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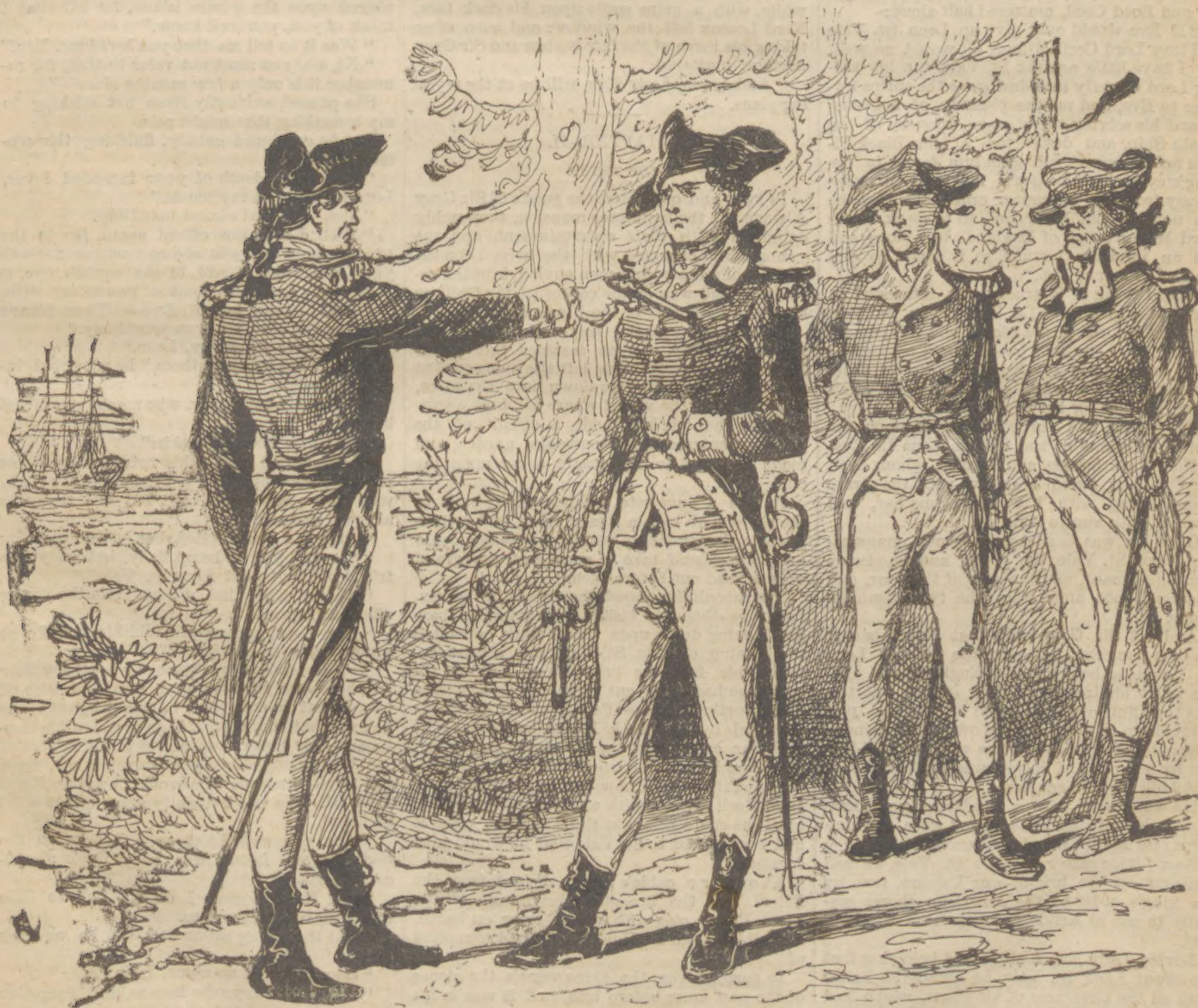
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No. 184

THE OCEAN VAMPIRE; or, THE HEIRESS OF CASTLE CURSE. A SEQUEL TO "THE BLACK PIRATE."

BY COL. PRENTISS INGRAHAM,

AUTHOR OF "MERLE, THE MUTINEER," "MONTEZUMA, THE MERCILESS," ETC., ETC., ETC.



KENT LOMAX PLACED THE MUZZLE OF THE PISTOL AGAINST THE BROAD BREAST OF HIS FOE, AND DREW THE TRIGGER.

The Ocean Vampire;

OR,

The Heiress of Castle Curse.

A Romance of Blue Water, when Swept by the Black Flag. A Sequel to "The Black Pirate; or, The Mystery of the Golden Fetters."

BY COLONEL PRENTISS INGRAHAM,
AUTHOR OF "MERLE, THE MUTINEER," "MONTEZUMA, THE MERCILESS," "SCARLET SCHOONER," ETC.

CHAPTER I.

THE SPY.

THE home of the King's Commissioner to his American Provinces was grandly illuminated, and within there was heard the sound of merry-making.

Strains of music floated upon the air, and the hum of voices, with now and then a ringing laughter, came from the open windows and were borne away upon the balmy breeze that rippled the waters of the harbor far below the hill upon which the grand old mansion stood.

Sir Grey Alstone, His Majesty's Commissioner, moved among his guests with a cheery smile and cordial manner, ever and anon glancing over at his beautiful daughter, Lady Eve, who was conversing with Lord Cecil Milnor, a handsome young noble of wealth, and the senior lieutenant of the famous Gallows Ship, the weird craft that had been lately brought into port by a brother officer, Leon St. Vale, in whose honor the guests were invited, he having hunted down the cruel Black Pirate, and solved the mystery of the Death Ship.

Taking a position where he was not observed, Sir Grey, still gazing upon his beautiful daughter and Lord Cecil, muttered half-aloud:

"If Eve would only give up Leon St. Vale and love Lord Cecil Milnor, all would go well.

"I have little against St. Vale, for his killing Lord Caverly in a duel gave the entire fortune to Eve, and me the pleasure of fingering it, and his solving this strange mystery of the Death Ship, and destruction of the Black Pirate and his crew, will gain him favor in the king's eyes, while he got a fair sum in prize-money from the buccaneer craft; but then he has nothing but his sword, so to speak, while Lord Milnor is one of England's best blood, and has an immense fortune, so it would be well for Eve to marry him.

"Lord Cecil, it is true, seems interested in that lovely girl, Lena La Rue, whom St. Vale rescued from the pirate island, and she regards him highly, I suspect; but it would be just the thing in romance for her to marry St. Vale, her rescuer, and while she is here as Eve's guest, I'll plot for her to do so."

He paused, and turned his gaze upon the maiden of whom he had spoken, Lena La Rue, a New York heiress and beauty, whom Leon St. Vale had found a captive upon the pirate island, along with her dying mother, and brought with him to Halifax.

Over her was bending, in earnest conversation, Leon St. Vale, the young and handsome naval lieutenant, and the hero of the hour, and it seemed not amiss that the two should be lovers.

And yet Sir Grey knew that Eve Alstone, his own daughter, had won the love of Leon St. Vale long before in old England, and that she fairly idolized the young officer; but this was the affair of the heart he intended to plot to break up to carry out his own selfish aims.

Standing in a niche of the window, half-bidden by a curtain of velvet, was another person watching the two couples.

He was a man with a handsome, yet somewhat bold and sinister face, and wore the uniform of a British naval lieutenant.

As a junior officer to Leon St. Vale, he had come out on the brig-of-war Vulture, sent by the king's order to the American shores specially to aid in driving piracy from the high seas.

Loving Lady Eve Alstone, and believing that she loved Leon St. Vale, he hated the latter with all the bitterness of his heart, which had been increased by his prompt punishment for an insult he had offered Lieutenant St. Vale upon the brig's deck, and which, to the surprise of all, he had passed over, outwardly, though in

his heart the seeds of revenge were taking deep root.

With his commander, Sir Roslyn Stannix, the captain of the Vulture, and other officers, he had been invited to the Alstone Manor to the entertainment in honor of Leon St. Vale, for his late gallant services upon the high seas, and it was gall poured into his soul to witness the loving look that passed between the young lieutenant, the hero, and Lady Eve Alstone, whenever the two drew near together.

At length Lord Cecil Milnor offered his arm to Lady Eve, and strolling across the room to where Leon St. Vale and Lena La Rue sat, as if by mutual, or rather quadruple consent, the gentlemen changed partners, and moved around the saloon to the strains of sweet music.

As Leon St. Vale halted in the dance, the two were within a few feet of the window, in which still stood Kent Lomax, watching them with eager, burning eyes, and concealed from view behind the lace and velvet curtains.

"Ere long the guests will leave, and when they do I would see you," said Lady Eve, in a low tone.

But the words distinctly reached the ears of Lieutenant Lomax.

"I am more than willing, Eve; shall I remain?" said the young man, softly, and his words were also heard by the eavesdropper.

"No, Leon, for I could not then see you alone, so leave with the rest, only pass through the wicker gate into the cliff garden and await me at the rustic arbor, my favorite retreat, as you know."

"I will be there, Lady Eve."

"And I will retire to my rooms as soon as the guests depart, and you know my boudoir opens upon the garden, so I'll not be seen seeking the trysting place."

"Now go and dance with some of the pretty Nova-Scotians, for I have no right to claim the lion of the hour for more than one waltz."

The young officer led Lady Eve to her seat, while, with a grim smile upon his dark face, Kent Lomax left the window, and soon after taking his leave of the fair hostess and Sir Grey Alstone, muttered:

"And I, too, Lady Eve, will be at the trysting-place."

CHAPTER II.

THE TRYST.

IN twos and quartettes the guests of Sir Grey Alstone left the handsome mansion, thoroughly delighted with their entertainment, and the young ladies charmed with the hero, Leon St. Vale, while the young men envied him the renown he had won as the captor of the Gallows Ship and destroyer of the Black Pirate.

Bidding adieu to Sir Grey, and thanking him for his courtesy, and an assumed farewell to Lady Eve, Leon St. Vale left the mansion, but instead of continuing on down into the town, and thence to the wharf where his boat awaited him, he quickly made a circuit of the grounds, entered the ornamental garden, and made his way to the rustic arbor upon the cliff.

It was a dove-cote looking affair, built in the shelter of half a dozen trees, and with a settee and easy-chairs within, where one could quietly rest and take a survey of the grand view spread out before them.

The moonlight caused the vessels in the harbor to be distinctly visible, and standing there and looking down upon them, while he waited the coming of Eve, St. Vale saw almost beneath his feet the brig-of-war Vulture, in which he had come out from England, with a little further on the Petrel, which had been captured by the Black Pirate, and set adrift with her crew swinging by chains in the rigging, had become known as the Gallows Ship.

The Petrel was now under command of Lord Cecil Milnor, with a prize crew on board, until she could be again fitted for sea, when it had been hinted to St. Vale that he would take command.

At anchor a cable's length distant from the Petrel, was the buccaneer brigantine of the Black Pirate, also with a prize crew on board, and which Leon St. Vale himself had command of.

In gazing upon the three vessels the scenes of the past arose before him, and it was in his heart to win a greater name and rank, to one day offer to Lady Eve.

He had loved her from their first meeting, and the man that it was intended she should

marry, he had killed in a duel, and yet she had not turned from him, and he felt that he was beloved by her.

Had he not loved Lady Eve, Leon St. Vale knew that his heart would have gone forth in love to the fair girl, Lena La Rue, whom he had found on the pirate's island and rescued; but even her beautiful face and lovely character had not won his allegiance for an instant from his first affection.

"No, Eve is the only woman I can ever love," he spoke, half aloud, and then started, as he felt a light touch upon his arm.

It was Lady Eve, who had approached unheard and unseen in his deep reverie, but who said playfully:

"That was said for my ears, Sir Lieutenant, for you knew I was near."

"Upon my honor I thought aloud, Eve; but it is kind of you to come here, and you are a brave little girl to meet me," and he gazed upon her beautiful face, and slender form, wrapped in her father's cloak which she had thrown around her.

"You forget that I met you once in the shadow of Castle Curse," she said, and with a shudder, as there flashed before her some unpleasant memory, called up by the words.

"Yes, after my duel with Lord Caverly; you were indeed brave then, for old Welcome Haven Castle, under its new and weird title of Castle Curse, was a dismal place for a lover's tryst, Lady Eve."

"It was indeed; but when I return to England I hope to make it my home, in spite of the curse that I inherited with it, for mine is not a superstitious nature, Leon; but now let me tell you why I asked you to meet me here."

"I am all attention, Eve," he said softly.

"It was not to tell you how I admired your courage in boarding that Gallows Ship and solving its hideous mystery, which all others shunned, nor of your pluck in driving the Black Pirate to destruction, or of the bold part you played upon the pirate island, for all that I think of you, you well know."

"Was it to tell me that you loved me, Eve?"

"No, no, you must not refer to that, for remember it is only a few months since—"

She paused, evidently from not wishing to say something that might pain.

But he continued calmly, finishing the sentence for her.

"Since the death of your intended lover, Lord Caverly, at my hands."

"Yes," she said almost inaudibly.

"Well, I shall not offend again, for in the eyes of the world you are as a widow for one year, and, I might add, in the world's eye, it is sacrilege for me to think of you as my wife."

"But I cannot help it, Eve— There I have done, so tell me what you would say."

"You have an enemy, Leon."

"Doubtless many of them," he answered, indifferently.

"But one in particular, who means you direct harm."

"Ah! how know you this?"

"Yesterday I sat in this arbor, when I was suddenly confronted by a youth in sailor garb, who had a handsome face, but one that was haggard and sad."

"At first I was startled, but he said quickly:

"I mean you no harm, lady, but are you a friend of Lieutenant Leon St. Vale?"

"Ah! he asked that, did he?" said the young officer in surprise.

"Yes, Leon, and when I told him that I was your friend, he continued:

"Then tell him to beware of a brother officer who professes friendship for him, and who, if he goes out in command of the brigantine, as he expects to do, desires to go as one of his lieutenants, for that one means to kill him."

"Why, Lady Eve, you surprise me, for I can think of no one who would be so base," and Leon St. Vale was evidently surprised at what he heard.

"Are you and Lieutenant Lomax on the best of terms, Leon?" was Lady Eve's significant question.

"Ha! Kent Lomax I do not believe likes me, though he appears to."

"Did the young sailor say that he was the one?"

"He mentioned no name, Leon."

"And did he say who he was, and his motive for warning me through you?"

"No, he merely said what I have told you, and, indignantly refusing some gold I offered him, turned and departed."

"This is strange, for I cannot place him, or understand his motive in thus warning me."

"But the night air is chill, and I fear for you to remain out longer; but I thank you for your kindness to me."

He would have drawn her toward him, but she drew back, grasped his hand, and with a simple word of farewell, retreated through the moonlit garden.

Leon St. Vale watched her until he saw her disappear from sight in the shadows of the wing of the mansion, and then wended his way toward the shore, by way of a path leading down the cliff.

As he passed through the gate at the border of Sir Grey's grounds, a man dropped down from the branches of one of the trees overhanging the arbor.

It was Kent Lomax, and he muttered:

"Already warned, and by a young sailor whom I must look up and silence; if gold will not do it, steel will."

"But no matter who warns, Leon St. Vale, you are doomed, and Lady Eve Alstone, you shall become my wife."

CHAPTER III.

"NUMBER THIRTEEN."

UPON reaching the beach, opposite where the captured pirate brigantine lay at anchor, Leon St. Vale hailed and ordered a boat sent ashore after him.

While waiting he saw a slenderly formed, youthful sailor approaching him at a quick pace.

"Well, my lad, you don't belong on board unless you have lately shipped," he said, as the young seaman halted near him, and seemingly without noticing his presence.

"No, sir, but I would like a berth on the brigantine with your permission," said the young sailor quietly, at the same time saluting politely.

There was something in the voice of the youth that caused St. Vale to start, and stepping nearer he gazed an instant into his face, while he said in hoarse tones:

"Great God! has the sea given up its dead?"

"Senor, I did not die," was the low reply.

"So I see, if you are—"

"Sh—senor, I am Number Thirteen."

"Yes, you were the unlucky one, self-constituted, in our shipwrecked crew, and when I drew the death-lot, to save me sprung into the sea," and Leon St. Vale spoke with considerable emotion.

"It was better so, Senor St. Vale. I was crazed with hunger and suffering, and when I saw the lot fall to you, to die and break the fated number of thirteen in the boat, I felt that death would be to me a boon, while you might live to conquer a great name, and you have, for not half an hour after I sprung overboard, as I believed to sink into the dark depths forever, you sighted, and fearlessly boarded the Gallows Ship, with which you captured the Black Pirate's brigantine."

"But how were you saved, Frank, for in vain I searched the waters for you?" and St. Vale was interested deeply in the answer.

"I am a good swimmer, senor, and lay floating upon the water until you rowed on."

"Then, mechanically I swam away from you, and soon sighted a small coast lugger, lying motionless upon the waters."

"Instantly the desire to live seized upon me, and I hailed them, was taken on board, and we were wrecked on the coast in the storm that followed, but I, with several others escaped."

"Learning at St. John's where I went, that you had come into Halifax with the Gallows Ship and pirate brigantine, I came hither to see you and at my lodging-house learned a secret that will interest you, as there is one you deem your friend plotting against you."

"Ha! and you it was that sought Lady Eve Alstone and bade her warn me?" quickly said St. Vale.

"Yes, senor, for, as you had some of the pirate crew on board, I dared not be seen by them, as I wished to be believed dead, and I could not see you otherwise, so I sought her."

"And I thank you, Frank; but tell me who is this foe of mine?"

"Lieutenant Lomax."

"As I expected. Well, being forewarned is forearmed, and I will know how to act."

"I expect to be sent out in command of the brigantine to hunt down other buccaneers, now that the Black Pirate is dead—"

"He is not dead, senor."

"Ha! do you know this?"

"Yes, senor, his crew drowned when his vessel went ashore; but the Devil takes care of his own, and he was saved."

"How know you this?"

"I saw him."

"You saw him?"

"Yes, senor, he was in Halifax to-day, and in disguise; but I recognized him by a ring he wore and his voice, though he did not see me."

"This is remarkable, for he surely was washed into the wild water with the rest of his crew."

"It is not remarkable for him, senor."

"Well, he intends mischief in being here."

"The Black Pirate can intend nothing else, senor."

"But here is my boat, and you must not be seen, so return to your lodgings, and I will come there in the morning and see you, for I need your aid, Frank."

"I am at the Anchor Inn, senor, and I am known there as Frank."

"I will find you; good-night."

The lad turned away as the boat drew near, and when it touched the beach St. Vale sprang in, and was rowed quickly back to the handsome vessel that had once flaunted the black flag so boldly from its peak.

CHAPTER IV.

THE PLOTTERS.

HAVING been up late into the night, it was approaching noon when Frank, the sailor lad, awoke and quickly ate the frugal breakfast awaiting him.

Not anxious to attract attention, he returned to his little room to await the coming of St. Vale, whom he expected might arrive at any moment, and had thrown himself into an easy-chair to indulge in reverie, when he heard the door of an adjoining room open and two persons enter, as he could tell by their tread and voices.

The language of one was refined, that of the other coarse, showing that they were in different walks in life.

"They are the same two I heard talking together day before yesterday," muttered Frank, and he arose and approached the partition dividing the rooms, and placed his eye first and then his ear to the hole left by a nail which had been withdrawn.

"Well, cap'n, what's in the wind now?" asked one of the two, a man in sailor garb, and with a bold, hard face, addressing one who, upon throwing aside his cloak and slouch hat, was recognizable as Kent Lomax, second lieutenant of the English brig-of-war Vulture.

"Well, I have changed my plan, Brent, and wish you to act at once," replied the officer.

"As how, lieutenant?"

"Why, put an end to St. Vale immediately."

"Before we leave port?"

"Yes."

"It will be a difficult job in port, when at sea it will be plain sailing, Mr. Lomax."

"But he is likely to get the brigantine, and if he sails in her he will do good service, while if he should die now, I think I can get the command of her, and thus favor my ends."

"It is risky, sir, here in port."

"The pay is large."

"It must be double what you promised me if he got lost at sea."

"You are grasping, Brent."

"It's not an atom to what you'll get by the lady."

"No insolence, Brent," angrily said the officer.

"We are shipmates on the same red cruise, you paying the gold and I doing the work, so I don't see why I should touch my hat and mince words when I speak to you."

Kent Lomax muttered something strangely like an oath, when the man made this bold remark, and said:

"Well, I'll give you the sum you demand if you do the deed within three days."

"It is too soon."

"Any time will do, if you do not fear to act."

"Oh, no, I'm accustomed to red deeds, so have no compunctions; but I cannot act in three days, as first I must enlist on the Vulture, and not on the brigantine, as I had intended, and then I have some little work of my own cut out to do."

"What matters that when you can make so much out of me?"

"I think I can make far more out of the other party."

"Ha! would you betray me?" and Kent Lomax let his hand drop upon a weapon in his pocket.

"Oh, no, not as long as you pay, Kent Lomax; but I know you of old, and will hold you to your bargain."

"What I have with another does not concern you, so don't interfere."

"But I am getting old enough to begin to save a little gold now, and I have a chance of making more every day."

"Wretch! you call taking human life for gold an easy way to make it?"

"Why not? What is one's loss is another's gain, and I happen to hold the helm in this particular, so shall steer to suit myself."

"Well, when will you do the deed?"

"Within the next two weeks."

"Not sooner?"

"No."

"Why put it off so long?"

"I have told you, to transact a little private affair of my own."

"If that does not suit you, hire some one else to drive a knife to his heart."

"No, I dare trust no one else than you."

"And recognizing in me one whom they tried to hang in England for a crime you knew him to be guilty of, and who was saved by your testimony in his favor, you felt you could get me to serve you in return for saving my neck."

"I did save you, Brent, and yet knew you were guilty."

"You would have been inhuman not to have done so, when twice you owed your life to me."

"But we will not speak of the past, but of the future."

"Are you content to abide my time?"

"I must be."

"Then it is settled, and within two weeks I will remove him from your path, so that you can marry the girl, and you had better lose no time, for she has put her fortune wholly in Sir Alstone's hands, and he is making it fly, and deceiving her as to how he gets his money."

"I believe you are right, and I wish to lose no time."

"Then I will act at the earliest moment I can."

"If you have a few golden guineas with you, please leave them for pocket money for me."

Kent Lomax, with a muttered oath, dashed several pieces of gold upon the table, and took his leave, while the sailor he had called Brent burst into a low, mocking laugh.

But neither one or the other dreamed that every word they had uttered had been heard by the sailor lad, whose quiet, grim smile showed that he meditated a counterplot against the plotters.

CHAPTER V.

ST. VALE AND THE YOUNG SAILOR.

AFTER the departure of the plotters the young sailor went to the window of his small room, and stood in deep meditation until he saw the tall form of Leon St. Vale coming up the street toward the inn.

Realizing how negligent had been both the sailor Brent and Lieutenant Lomax in conversing aloud in a room, the locality of which they seemed not to understand was adjacent to others, he determined not to get caught in the same way, and consequently tried the doors upon either side of him.

One was the room of Brent, and was unlocked; the other seemed to be a store-room, and was locked; but the lad saw that there was a wall, and not a thin partition, dividing his room from it.

Hastening down-stairs, he called to St. Vale, who was just turning away, having been told by the landlord that the youth was not in, and the two ascended to the little room.

"Well, senor, I have just overheard a new plot to get rid of you," and Frank went on to tell St. Vale all that had passed between Lieutenant Lomax and the sailor.

The officer listened in surprise at the exposure of the villainy of his brother lieutenant, and asked:

"Are you certain it was Lomax?"

"So the man Brent called him, senor."

"Well, I must be on my guard, and thwart the little game of Kent Lomax."

"I could call him out, but were I to kill a brother officer now, so soon after my affair with Lord Caverly, it would hurt me in the eyes of the king, and keep from me the com-

mand of the brigantine, so I must just wait and watch."

"And I will help you, senor, for I will make the acquaintance of this man Brent, get friendly with him, by spending my gold freely, and perhaps learn of his intended movements so as to catch him in his own trap."

"Once we have him, and his testimony, for he will confess all to save himself, and mine, will readily send Lieutenant Lomax out of the navy in disgrace."

"Yes, that is the best plan, Frank, and I leave all in your hands."

"The brigantine comes into the dock to-day, and I can be found there, if you need me, and when I sail I want you with me, and to prevent your being recognized by those men from the island who came with me, I will send them on board the Vulture, and you can pilot me to the Gulf haunts, as well as those in the Caribbees, of the buccaneers."

"Have you seen or heard more of Captain Ebony, the Black Pirate?"

"No, senor; he is keeping close, but I am convinced that he is plotting to retake the brigantine."

"But he has no men."

"He can readily enlist men here who will go on any desperate cruise."

"I believe you are right, and I shall keep a closer eye on the vessel."

"Ah, he'll not make a move until she is ready for sea, with her stores on board, and thoroughly refitted and equipped."

"If you can ascertain where he is staying, do so, and we can catch him, and I'll christen the brigantine before she starts on her cruise, by hanging him to the yard-arm."

"Now here is gold for you, which you may need," and St. Vale drew from his pocket a silk purse heavy with the precious metal.

"No, senor, I need no gold."

"But you are working for me, and—"

"You forget that I am working for myself too, senor, for the one aim of my life is to hunt to death the Black Pirate."

"Ah, yes, you indeed have cause; but you may need money."

"If I do, I have a king's ransom in jewels about me."

St. Vale gazed an instant fixedly into the face of the young sailor, and then said:

"Well, you know where to find me, and I can find you here, if I need you, so I will leave."

"Don't be reckless, and remember, Frank, we are friends, enlisted together in a good cause."

The youth grasped the officer's hand warmly, but made no reply, and the two parted, the former to rig himself up in a disguise and saunter forth upon the street, and the lieutenant to wend his way to the elegant home of Sir Grey Alstone, to pay a short visit to Lady Eve and her guest, Lena La Rue, to inquire regarding their health after the festivities of the past night.

CHAPTER VI.

AN UNWELCOME VISITOR.

WHEN Leon St. Vale reached the home of Sir Grey Alstone, he was told that the baronet had gone down into the town, and the young ladies had ridden off on horseback for a gallop, but did not expect to remain long away.

"Then I will await them, and kill time by a stroll in the garden," he answered, and in a couple of minutes more he was standing in front of the rustic arbor, the scene of his tryst the night before with Lady Eve, and enjoying the beauty of the view spread out before him.

Tiring of this he turned and spied a book upon the settee, and picking it up was about to throw himself upon the seat to read, when he recalled to mind that a hammock swung in the pine thicket a few paces away.

Here he indolently reclined, and began to read; but he had lost much rest of late, and involuntarily his eyes closed and he dropped to sleep.

Perhaps for half an hour he slumbered, and then was awakened by voices.

Glancing out from where he lay he saw Sir Grey Alstone standing in front of the arbor, and confronting him was a man in sailor's garb and one whom he at once recognized as a seaman on board the Vulture.

He started to spring from the hammock and make his presence known, when he was checked by the voice of the seaman, who said, apparently in answer to a remark of the baronet:

"If I were impudent in sayin' I had ter see yer here, Sir Grey, I didn't mean it so; but I needs money, and when I got the letter I did from home to-day, and had none to send to the old folks, I determined to call on you, and so asked you to let me see you here, when I met you down street awhile ago."

"And demanded that I should meet you, sirrah," said the baronet angrily.

"When you refused to have anything to say to me, sir."

"Well, now I have honored you by coming, what do you want?"

"Money."

"Well, go to your paymaster, and do not come to me."

"I hav'n't a month's pay comin', sir, and so I come to you, for the bank failure took my old father's savings and my aged parents will lose their little home, if I don't send money to pay off the mortgage, due in six months."

"If your officers know you as a true worthy man, they will lend you gold; but I like not your demand, with an implied threat, in seeking me."

"I hated to do it, sir, but you would not listen to me, and I hates to get money by a secret, but I has to do it now, to save the old home, though I wouldn't do it for myself."

"A secret! what mean you, fellow?" said the baronet hoarsely.

Leon St. Vale had heard too much to make his presence known now, and he hoped by remaining quiet to escape unperceived, though his face flushed at being forced to play eaves-dropper.

"I mean, sir, that I was the sailor that rowed the lieutenant to the beach under Castle Curse, when he went to have his duel with Lord Caverly."

"Yes, I recall you now; but what care I who and what you are?"

"You'll care, Sir Grey, when you know that I saw your underhand work that day," was the bold reply.

"What! do you dare say to me that I acted dishonorably?" hissed the baronet, trembling with passion, and Leon St. Vale, whose name had been mentioned by the seaman, and whose duel with Lord Caverly had been referred to, now listened with the deepest interest.

"I mean, Sir Grey, that I know that your brother left in his will his fortune to Lord Caverly and Lady Eve Alstone, if they should marry each other, and that she was engaged to him, by your command, though the lads aboard ship do say she loved the lieutenant, than whom no finer man lives."

"Silence, sir! this is impertinence from your lips."

"You had better listen, Sir Grey, or I may tell it to others," doggedly said the seaman, and then, as the baronet remained silent, he continued:

"Lord Caverly was jealous of Lieutenant St. Vale, and insulted him, and you remember the duel that followed, as well as I do that you urged it on, for if the young nobleman was killed Lady Eve got all, and I was sitting in the boat and watching you."

"Well?" almost gasped the baronet.

"When the lieutenant spared Lord Caverly, you urged a second meeting, and I saw you load the pistol with powder and leave out the ball, so that if Lord Caverly demanded another fire, should he not be shot, it would give the lieutenant another chance to kill him."

Leon St. Vale half raised himself from his position of reclining in the hammock at this startling charge against the baronet, who had been the second of his adversary; but after a second's thought, dropped quietly back again, and listened.

"Curse you, thou infamous sea-hound, do you dare make this false charge against me?" hoarsely cried the baronet.

"It is not false, Sir Grey, for I saw what I say."

"And you have spread this charge against me?" eagerly asked the baronet.

"Not to a soul have I mentioned it, for it was no affair of mine, and on account of sweet Lady Eve, I didn't want you to be disgraced; but I know of what I speak, and in the trouble of the old folks at home I come to you and ask for money to help them out."

"Though the charge is utterly false, I am willing to help you, my man, so how much do you want?" and the whole manner of the baronet changed.

"A little matter to you, sir, but a big one to me, of a hundred and thirty pounds."

The baronet gave a sigh of relief, for he had expected to be most freely bled, and said:

"You shall have it, my man. I will give you a bill of exchange on London for the amount to-morrow, if you will call on me, and a few pounds of gold for spending money for yourself."

"No, Sir Grey, I wouldn't touch a dollar of your gold for myself, and if I ever can, will pay you back what I get for the old folks."

"Good-day, sir, and I will call to-morrow, thank you, sir," and the seaman walked away by the cliff path, leaving Sir Grey Alstone standing in painful meditation, leaning against the rustic arbor.

For several moments he stood thus in silence, Leon St. Vale, from his secret retreat, gazing fixedly upon his face, and then he started as two persons emerged from the garden shrubbery and confronted him.

CHAPTER VII.

THE SLAVE OF A SIN.

THE two persons who appeared upon the scene were a servant from the mansion, escorting a man dressed in a sailor suit, and who was the one who had been in secret conference with Lieutenant Lomax at the inn.

"A sailor man to see you, sir, and I brought him to find you, as he said it was very important," said the servant.

"All right, Lemuel, I will look after him now," and as Sir Grey spoke he turned his eyes upon the stranger.

The start that he gave was seen by St. Vale, as was also a certain pallor of the face, showing that the man was no stranger to him.

"I have come again, Sir Grey," said the man, with a sinister smile, as soon as the servant was out of hearing.

"So I see, and for what reason, fellow?" was the haughty response of the baronet.

"For money, of course," was the insolent reply.

"You cannot have it."

"Cannot?"

"Shall not, if you like the words better."

The man smiled, and the baronet continued:

"I kept my contract with you, and owe you nothing."

"But good-will."

"I do not owe you that."

"After all that I did for you?"

"You saved me some money once, and I paid you for it."

"Sir Grey Alstone, your father sold some land once and got pay for it, giving a written bill of sale to the purchaser, until it could be recorded."

"On the way home that purchaser fell from his horse dead, and I carried him into my father's house and found upon him the paper which I kept."

"By a strange coincidence your father was thrown from his horse and killed the same day, and I gave you the paper, and you resold the land for a large price and paid me a pittance."

"Now you are rich, and I come to you for money."

"You cannot get it."

"You have a fortune."

"It is my daughter's, not mine."

"But you are squandering it, Sir Grey."

"Leave me, Robert Brent, or I will have my servants come and hurl you from this cliff," cried the baronet, savagely.

"I will not leave, and you dare not carry out your threat, Sir Grey."

"Do you dare me, villain?"

"Yes."

Sir Grey seemed about to call aloud for help, when the look in the face of the man deterred him, it was so full of daring and devilish cunning.

"Why do you not carry out your threat, Sir Grey Alstone?" sneered Brent.

"I wish no scene."

"You fear to have one, and I will tell you why—you fear me."

"I fear you!" said the baronet, with sarcasm.

"Yes, for I hold a secret of yours, and you are my slave."

"Bah! what proof have you that I resold the land my father had been paid for?" said Sir Grey, contemptuously.

"I do not refer to the land transaction, for I have no proof of it; but I have proof of other villainy that will ruin you."

"By Heaven! you shall rue those words," and Sir Grey moved toward the man, as though to strike him down, but he put himself

on his guard, drawing from beneath his jacket a long knife, while he said sternly:

"Don't threaten me, Sir Grey Alstone, for I am no man to submit to it; but I repeat, I can ruin you, and, by the Lord above, I will, if you do not pay me the sum I demand."

The baronet knew not what dread secret the man held, but having been a sinful man in the past, his conscience warned him that he faced a deadly foe that he must not drive too hard, and he said anxiously:

"What is it that you know, Robert Brent?"

"I know, Sir Grey Alstone, that when my father was your father's agent, my sister and myself lived with him in a pretty cottage-house not far from the mansion, and that you won the love of poor Bertie, deceived and dishonored her, and then forced her to marry a young scapegrace, whom you paid to aid you in keeping secret your wrong to her, as just then you were about to be married."

"The same night that Lady Alstone gave birth to an infant, a little girl was born in our humble cottage; but mark the difference."

"The nurse who had been summoned from my sister's side to care for Lady Alstone, showed you your boy, a *fearfully deformed* infant, and told you of Bertie's pretty baby girl."

"Instantly you bribed her to an act of villainy, which was to change the children at once, for neither mother had seen her child, and, as you remember, the old doctor was ill and in bed in the mansion, not to be called in except in direct need."

"The nurse, Nan Nailor, accepted your bribe, carried your deformed child in her arms to our cottage, placed it by the side of poor Bertie, and took her sweet babe back to the elegant cradle of Lady Alstone."

"It is a lie," almost shrieked Sir Grey.

"It is the truth, as you know, and as I can prove, for old Nan Nailor did not die of the poison you administered to her—"

"Good God!"

"Ah! well may you cry out, for she lives and told me all, and I am taking care of her in her old age."

"No one will believe her."

"She has told but one other and—"

"And in the name of heaven, who is it that she has told?" cried Sir Grey in trembling tones.

"The priest, whom we call Pere Brandt."

The baronet gave a sigh of relief, and Robert Brent continued.

"You may remember that Bertie, poor girl, never recovered from the shock, when she beheld the deformed child, which she considered a punishment for her sin, and she and the poor little wretch died the same day and were buried together."

"But in their coffin was a paper in a tin box, written by Nan Nailor, telling of her wrong in being bribed by you."

"Bertie's child did not die, but grew to womanhood, and is now known as Lady Eve Alstone; but, should the world know that she is not your daughter, she would have no claim upon the fortune she now has."

Sir Grey Alstone was now as white as a corpse.

He twice tried to speak, but could not, while Robert Brent stood confronting him, evidently enjoying the anguish he had brought upon him.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE DEMAND.

"Now, Sir Grey Alstone, you will see the propriety of giving me gold, when I ask it of you."

Robert Brent spoke in a tone in which there was no mistaking the threat that he would divulge all unless the gold was forthcoming, and so the baronet understood it, but he cried, hoarsely:

"I have no gold of my own."

"I care not whose gold you give, so that I get it."

"But I can get no money for you."

"A man who has a fortune under his control, can certainly raise a few thousands for a poor man," was the sneer.

"What! do you mean to beg of me thousands?" cried the baronet, in alarm.

"I beg of you nothing, Sir Grey, I demand of you two thousand pounds."

"I can never give it to you."

"Then I shall take all from you by showing that Lady Eve has no right to it, and that you have sinned in palming her off as your child,

and in attempting to poison old Nan to bury the secret."

"Now, my demand is a small one, so say whether you will pay it or not, so I may know how to act."

The baronet trembled with fear and fairly quivered with rage; but he knew he was the slave of the sins he had committed, and that he must do as the master who held his secrets dictated.

His pay as Commissioner he readily spent by the day he drew it, and he took from Lady Eve's fortune his living expenses and luxuries, and the two thousand pounds demanded he knew must also come from her.

Of late he had drawn on her resources rather heavily, having lost considerable in gambling; but he must silence Robert Brent, and to do so he must take her money, or lose all, if the secret of her birth became known.

These thoughts coursed wildly through his brain for a moment, while Robert Brent stood quietly watching his emotion and seeming to read his very thoughts.

"Well, Sir Grey, which shall it be?" said the man, after a long silence between them, which, to Leon St. Vale, still reclining in the hammock, seemed interminable, for he was strangely wrought up by all that he had heard, and the thought of his position, should he be discovered—for the shame of it was something that he felt most deeply.

"I will pay you the money you demand, Brent, but upon one condition," said the baronet, fiercely.

"And what is that condition?"

"That you never approach me again for money."

"I shall make no such condition."

"Then you cannot have it."

"Bah! you dare not refuse to give me a pittance out of the thousands you have. I am not extravagant in my demands, and if you did not have money to give I would not betray you from spite, and I'll not be the one to kill the goose that lays the golden egg. I'll come to you, if I need any money, now and then, and you will let me have it, so make no conditions with me, for I'll not agree."

"You would rob me, villain."

"Call it what you please, only give me the money."

"Come to the mansion to-morrow at this time, and you shall have it."

"I will be there, Sir Grey," and the man left the spot by way of the cliff path to the beach.

Once more did Sir Grey Alstone stand in almost dumb surprise, only there was a deadly pallor upon his face, and in his eyes a wicked glare, as he muttered:

"By Heaven! I mean that one sin shall hide another, and I will break the chain that binds me, for that man shall not dog my steps to the grave."

"No, he shall die!"

"Who is it that shall die, Sir Grey?"

The baronet fairly lost nerve as the deep voice and question fell on his ears, and a cry broke from his lips.

But, seeing who it was, he hastily gained control of himself, and answered quickly:

"Ah! it is you, is it, Lieutenant St. Vale?"

"Why of course it is, and you overheard my remark as you came up, and it shows how circumstantial evidence will often hang a man, for I was speaking of my favorite dog, Fido, whom I fear is tainted with madness, and after a long time I have made up my mind that he shall die; but if any one connected with me should die suddenly after your hearing me think aloud, it would look strange, would it not, my dear St. Vale?"

Sir Grey Alstone had not intended to make so long an explanation; but the dark, searching eyes of the young officer were fixed upon him in a way that made him run on nervously, and yet he seemed to feel that he was not believed, and the very first words of St. Vale convinced him of that fact, for he said:

"Don't kill poor Fido, Sir Grey Alstone, and to commit murder is a bad way to help yourself out of a difficulty."

"What do you mean, sir, by your words?" angrily asked the baronet.

"I simply wish to ask you, Sir Grey, to promise me your daughter's hand in marriage, when she is willing to bestow it upon me," was the smiling reply.

"No, sir, for I consider my daughter as already engaged."

"She is still, figuratively speaking, in

mourning for her dead intended husband, sir, Lord Caverly."

"Whom you killed, St. Vale, and now speak of your act with utter heartlessness."

"You are mistaken, sir, for I feel deeply the life upon my hands, and you, as Lord Caverly's second, know that I spared him until patience ceased to be a virtue with me."

"But you are the last that should throw his death in my teeth, as you got a fortune to handle thereby, and it kept you out of a serious trouble with your creditors."

"Lieutenant St. Vale, I cannot listen to such language from you, sir, and I shall resent—"

"You will do nothing of the kind, Sir Grey Alstone, for if you challenged me I would not meet you, and if you forced me to it, I would kill you, and you are fond of life."

"You shall hear what I have to say and we will make a compromise."

"Never, sir!"

"You are mistaken; we will, and *never* is a harsh word to use, for it often falls falsely from the lips of men and women."

"That you have frowned down my attention to your daughter I have always known, and that you cordially dislike me, because I am poor, I also am aware of, notwithstanding the very elegant entertainment you gave in my honor last night."

"But I love your daughter, and she has confessed to her love for me, and I waive what you are and ask you for her hand, when a sufficient time has elapsed after the death of poor hot-brained Lord Caverly."

"And I distinctly refuse to allow you to entertain a thought as the suitor of my daughter, and tell you that she is as well as pledged to another."

"You refer to Lord Milnor? You are mistaken, for I have reason to know that he is deeply interested in that lovely American girl, Miss La Rue, whom I rescued from the Black Pirate's Island."

"Bah! that is sentiment, and as she is lovely and rich why do you not marry her yourself, for your meeting has been most romantic?"

"I do not love her, my dear Sir Grey."

"Well, you can never have Lady Eve."

"Is this your irrevocable decision?"

"It is."

CHAPTER IX.

REAPING THE WHIRLWIND.

WHEN the baronet answered that he gave his irrevocable decision, that Lady Eve should never wed Leon St. Vale, the latter laughed lightly, and replied:

"Why, my dear Sir Grey, if you talk thus, I shall have to use an argument to make you retract your words."

"Lieutenant Leon St. Vale, no man can make me retract my words," was the stern rejoinder.

"And yet twice before to-day I have seen you do just what you now say you will not do."

The baronet turned to the hue of death, the color, called to his face by anger, retreating before the fear that seized upon him at St. Vale's words.

"Twice before! what do you mean?" he gasped.

"Simply, my dear sir, that I was asleep in yonder hammock, and was awakened by your coming to this spot, accompanied by a sailor who wanted to beg of you some money, and who forced you to promise it to him, as he saw an act of yours, at the time of my duel with Lord Caverly, that had I then seen, I would have shot you down in your tracks."

"But he lies, he lies!" and the baronet shrieked the words.

"Then why pay him the money he demands?"

"No, he told the truth; and more, the second villain in this life-play also told the truth regarding the sin you committed against the woman, Bertie Brent, and—"

"Accursed eavesdropper, I have a mind to kill you where you stand."

"A man of your stamp, Sir Grey Alstone, cannot insult me, and I only refrain from exposing you on account of Lady Eve, to whose heart I would not bring one atom of sorrow."

"I love her, and not her fortune; but as she would have to suffer to give up her inheritance, I will keep the secret, but demand of you as my payment for so doing your outward good will and consent to her becoming my wife, for her birth does not influence my love, or even the thought that she is known as your child."

There was a sneer in the voice of the young officer which seemed to drive the baronet to frenzy, for he cried in a voice hoarse with passion:

"By the Heaven above, Leon St. Vale, you shall not marry my daughter; I swear it."

"Then you take a false oath, for if I have to tell her all, and leave the king's service and seek employment in America, she shall be my wife."

"Never!"

"You had better not bring matters to a bitter ending, but accept the situation, pay that wretch his money, smile on me before the world as your chosen lover for your daughter, and give her to me with your blessing, for if you continue to finger her fortune she will be a dowerless bride."

"Devil, I say never!"

Quick as a flash, with the words, Sir Grey Alstone thrust his hand into his bosom, drew out a long-bladed knife, and sprung upon the young officer.

Leon St. Vale caught his uplifted arm in an iron gripe, but instantly the baronet drew a small pistol with his disengaged hand, and in striking the muzzle aside it was turned toward the bosom of Sir Grey Alstone when his finger was upon the trigger.

With the explosion a cry broke from the lips of Sir Grey Alstone, and he sunk dead in his tracks.

"Good God!"

The words came from Leon St. Vale as though breathed in mental anguish.

"You've done it, lieutenant, and as you've lost me a cool two thousand pounds, I'll swear against you, and there'll be the funny sight of a king's officer run up into the rigging with a rope around his neck."

Leon St. Vale gazed upon the speaker with a look of horror.

It was Robert Brent, who had glanced back as he left the cliff, and, seeing St. Vale leave the hammock, had crept quietly back and heard all that passed.

"Villain, it was an accident, as you saw," he said, hoarsely.

"No, no, I won't swear that way, lieutenant, until you give me five thousand pounds, for I'd have gotten that much out of him," said the man, doggedly.

"Not one pound would I give you, even had I the sum you name."

"Then I swear my way: you killed him because he would not let you have his daughter."

"See, the servants are coming, so what will you do?"

"This!"

The words came venomously from the lips of Leon St. Vale, and springing upon the man, he hurled him to the ground, placed his foot upon his throat, and held his sword-point over his heart.

The next instant up dashed Lemuel, the butler, and other servants alarmed by the shot, and in stern tones Leon St. Vale said:

"Send on board my vessel for a guard of marines, for this man murdered Sir Grey Alstone."

CHAPTER X.

THE TABLES TURNED.

THE will made by Alvin Alstone, the brother of Sir Grey, was a strange one, in that the father confessor of the dying man, Pere Brandt, had forced him to make it in favor of Lady Eve, the priest himself having been made to influence the millionaire brother of the baronet, by a secret power held over him by Sir Grey Alstone.

Thus driven, for fear of the curse of the Church, to make his brother's child his heiress, should she marry his former choice; Lord Caverly, Alvin Alstone had left with the inheritance a bitter curse.

This was kept by her father away from Eve's ears, but it came to her at last, and when she saw her father borne dead into the mansion, she dropped upon her knees and cried bitterly:

"Oh, God, have mercy! The curse of Alvin Alstone has fallen upon me in this cruel murder of my poor father."

Fortunate was it for poor Eve that Lena La Rue was with her in her deep affliction to give her consolation, for Leon St. Vale had shunned a meeting with her, and himself escorted the man he had accused of murder to the prison, where he knew he must take him, and not on board ship, as he had at first intended.

He had suddenly taken a bold, desperate

stand to save himself, when threatened by Robert Brent, and he was determined to carry it out to the bitter end.

Had Brent not appeared, hard as it would have been for him, he would have told the truth of a struggle with Sir Grey and the accidental discharge of the weapon, though he felt that it would forever sever him from Lady Eve.

But when Robert Brent threatened him with the accusation of deliberate murder, he felt that it would be believed against him, as there could be seen no reason why the man should make a charge so false without cause, and then the desire of self-preservation flashed through his mind, and he acted as the reader has seen.

Having taken this bold step, he was resolved to maintain it, and it came before him, as Lady Eve would not know him as the one who killed her father, that he would bury the secret in his own heart, and yet win her for his wife.

But he had not the courage to face her after the fearful deed, and leaving to Manuel the duty of breaking the sad news to her, he marched off with his prisoner to the guard-house.

Wholly taken by surprise by the bold manner in which the tables had been turned upon him, Robert Brent was at first seemingly dazed, and sullenly arose at the stern order of his captor.

With his silk sash the young officer bound the man, and, saying that he wished to avoid the crowd in the streets as much as possible, started by the cliff path to the beach, to go that way into the town.

He saw the form of Sir Grey raised in the arms of the servants, and Lemuel hastened on ahead to the mansion with the sad tidings, and then he ordered Brent to march.

"Great God, lieutenant, you surely don't intend to lay your crime on me," said the now thoroughly frightened man, as he moved sullenly down the path, his bound hands behind him, trembling nervously, and his face livid.

"I surely intend to make known the fact that you tried to extort money from Sir Grey Alstone, and when he refused, attacked and killed him, wrenching his pistol from his hand to do it with," was the cool reply.

"They'll ask why you didn't come to the rescue?"

"I was asleep in the hammock, and when awakened by loud voices arose and started to Sir Grey's aid, but was not in time to save him."

"As you are a common sailor and I an officer, I will be believed and you will hang for it."

"Look here, lieutenant, I'll compromise with you."

"I accept no compromise."

"Then I out and tell the whole story, and the old woman in England can verify it, and you'll get a wife who had not an honorable parentage, and who will be a pauper, if she marries a man whom I can prove killed her father, even if it was an accident."

These bold words completely turned the tables upon St. Vale, and he turned deadly pale, and the man was not slow in making the best of it, for he continued:

"Better compromise, lieutenant."

"What compromise would you offer?"

"Let me escape; say I threw you down the bank, and the fall stunned you, and I got away."

"I can hide away until the affair blows over."

"No."

"Then it's nip and tuck whether you or I hang for it, and as I have been a gambler all my life I'll take the chances on it, for I have proof, and you have not."

St. Vale readily recognized this fact, and most of all, he saw that the counter-charge of Robert Brent would greatly damage him with all and almost certainly forever separate him from Lady Eve.

They had almost reached the first house on the shore, and he had but little time to act, and yet he knew not what to say or do, so completely were the tables turned upon him.

The next instant several men appeared in sight coming toward them, and he said hastily:

"Make no explanation one way or the other until you see me, and I will to-night visit you in prison."

"It will be too late then," said the prisoner, doggedly.

"Not so; do as I say, and trust me."

"All right, lieutenant," and neither said

more, as a crowd began to gather around them, to inquire why Lieutenant St. Vale was escorting a sailor, securely bound, through the streets, and with his drawn sword held threateningly over him.

CHAPTER XI.

A COMPROMISE.

GRIM and stern, yet with foreboding and nervous fear at his heart, Robert Brent sat in the cell of the military guard-house, anxiously awaiting the promised visit of Lieutenant Leon St. Vale.

He had longed to get the money demanded of Sir Grey, and failing in that, through the baronet's death, he had tried to wring it from St. Vale through fear, but was again thwarted, and now he only wished to save his life.

Had St. Vale permitted him to escape, on the way to the guard-house, he knew he could easily save himself by seeking secure quarters; but now that the iron bars and heavy locks shut him in how was he to get away?

He could tell his story frankly, of the crimes of the baronet, and his seeking him to obtain money; but that might not clear him against the word of an officer so honorable and highly respected as Leon St. Vale, and he felt, the more he thought of it, that he would be the victim, even though he might bring suspicion upon the lieutenant, and also thwart his marriage with Lady Eve.

But that would matter little to him, if the yard-arm was ornamented with his form, or he had to face a platoon of soldiers as a condemned murderer.

As the hours passed by and St. Vale did not come, Brent began to think of sending for Lieutenant Lomax to aid him in his trouble, and this brought up a train of thought that caused him to mutter:

"If I get out of this it will be lucky for me that I met the lieutenant as I did, and found out what he was."

"Why I intended to simply seize and knife him to get my money from Lomax, for he is a giant for strength, and handled me as though I had been a child."

"If I get out of this I guess I'll be content to let him alone, and will tell Lomax to get some one else to kill the lieutenant, for I'll admit I'm afraid of him, and would be mighty sure before I drew sight on him, or attempted to drive a knife to his heart."

"Ah! there comes some one now."

Two persons halted at the door as he spoke, and he saw that one was the guard, the other Leon St. Vale.

"Well, sir, I have to ask you a few questions, which you may answer or not as you please."

"Leave us alone, guard," said St. Vale, sternly.

He entered the cell as he spoke, the key was turned behind him in the lock, and the sentinel, with a polite salute walked away.

"Well, lieutenant, I'm glad you've come, for this is not a cheerful place to be in," said Robert Brent, with a faint smile.

Without replying to his remark, St. Vale asked quietly, and in a low tone:

"Have you a compromise to offer now?"

"I'm not in a condition or a position now to offer a compromise," said the man, sadly.

"I am, and I shall offer you terms."

"I'll agree before they are offered, if it's to get out of here," eagerly said Brent.

"It is that you take a solemn oath, never to divulge to mortal the secrets you know regarding the late Sir Grey Alstone and his daughter's, or supposed daughter's, birth, and also to in no way implicate me in his death."

"What terms do you offer, lieutenant?" asked the man, his love for gold, even when life was at stake, causing him to strive and drive a bargain.

"Your freedom and one hundred pounds to get away from here."

"Make it a thousand pounds."

"No, for I am a poor man."

"You got a rich haul, folks say, in the capture of the Black Pirate's brigantine."

"I took the craft as my share, and all else was divided among the crew of the Vulture."

"Make it two hundred pounds then, lieutenant," urged Brent.

"Not a shilling over one hundred, for it costs me as much more to free you."

"Ah! then I agree to your terms."

"And will take the oath I dictate?"

"By all that you deem holy on earth and in Heaven, never to divulge those secrets, or im-

plicate me?" and Lieutenant St. Vale spoke in a solemn voice.

"I swear," answered Brent, impressively.

"Then to-night you shall go free."

"How?"

"After the guard is relieved at midnight the one who comes on duty will unlock your door and release you."

"And get shot for his pains; but that is not my look-out."

"No, he goes with you."

"Ah!"

"Yes, and he will lead you to a wagon waiting near by, and the driver will at once take you to the point off which you will find at anchor a smack awaiting, in which you can run down the coast to Portland or Boston, and sell for what it is worth, for I bought it for you, and it is fully stored for a month's cruise."

"But there is one thing more."

"Well, lieutenant?"

"The soldier who goes with you must never land."

"Ah!"

"Yes, for he is given to drink, and a tongue loosened by liquor will betray secrets that may cost valuable lives."

"I understand you, lieutenant, and I think with you, it would be better for me to arrive in port alone," was the cool and significant reply of the villain.

"Well, here is your hundred pounds, and the sentinel will release you as I have said."

"Remember your oath."

"I'll not forget it, and I thank you, lieutenant, and good luck attend you."

"Good-by, sir."

He held forth his hand as he spoke, but Leon St. Vale did not take it, and turned silently away, and called to the guard that he was ready to go.

Once out in the open air, and he turned his steps in the direction of the Alstone mansion, while he said, bitterly:

"Great God! how I have fallen this day."

"And yet I meant not to sin, and a football of Fate am driven on by cruel circumstances over which I have no control."

CHAPTER XII.

THE FLIGHT.

WEARILY the time dragged away to Robert Brent, and he counted the minutes instead of the hours, until he heard the cry of the sentinel.

"Twelve o'clock! And all's well!"

He saw the relief guard march up and leave another sentinel, and the one who had been on the post fall in and go off with his comrades.

Then he waited in breathless silence.

What if another sentinel had been placed on duty than the one with whom Leon St. Vale had entered into the plot?

What if he had already gotten drunk, for he must have been paid by the lieutenant, and divulged the secret?

And again, what if he feared to take the risk when it came to the time, or having his money, would refuse to do so?

Such were the thoughts floating in the brain of the prisoner, until he became almost wild with suspense.

Eagerly he watched the silent sentinel pace to and fro, as though he had no other thought than his duty, and he was just beginning to give up all hope, and feel certain that the plot had in some way miscarried, when the guard approached the iron gate and asked in a low tone:

"Are you the man who kilt ther Baronet Alstone?"

"Yes," was the eager response.

"You'll die for it if you stay here."

"I am aware of that."

"Better not stay then," said the imperturbable sentinel.

"I am just your way of thinking, my man, so perhaps you can get me out," answered the impatient prisoner.

"I can; come, but be awful shy."

He unlocked the door as he spoke, took the bunch of keys from the lock, and unfastened the irons upon the prisoner's wrists, and motioned to him to follow.

This, Robert Brent gladly did, and they passed into the street and hastened along the deserted thoroughfares toward the harbor shores.

At the point which St. Vale had spoken of, was a small boat, and anchored off a short distance a trim-looking little smack of fifteen

tons, tugging restlessly at her cable, as though anxious to spread her sails and fly away.

Fifteen minutes after leaving the prison the two men were on the deck of the little craft, and it was flying out toward open water with a fair breeze blowing, leaving behind it the quiet town, and the frowning forts upon the heights.

Robert Brent was a good seaman, and the soldier had once been a sailor, so that the two were at home upon the water, and the little smack made the best of the breeze under their skillful guidance.

It was the intention of Robert Brent to keep close inshore, to take advantage of an inlet, or hiding on the land, if pursued, and rounding Cape Sable to cross the Bay of Fundy to the Maine coast.

He had hated to leave Halifax, great as was the danger in remaining there, without earning the blood money agreed upon with Kent Lomax for taking St. Vale's life; but he had already felt the iron strength of the young officer and cared not to make the attempt single-handed, and feared to delay his departure.

Compunctions of conscience he had none, as to killing the lieutenant, could he do so with perfect safety to himself, for he loved life, and though no coward, would not take too great risks unless forced to it.

It was dawn when the smack arrived off King's Bay, and as she was running along close inshore under a six-knot breeze, Brent felt in a good humor, and said, pleasantly:

"Well, messmate, I guess we can make the run all right to Portland."

"Yes, without doubt," answered the soldier, who had changed his uniform for a sailor suit.

"You are a good old salt for a marine," continued Brent.

"I served my time as a lad aboard ship."

"So I should judge; but tell me, have you known the lieutenant long?"

"What lieutenant?"

"The one who fixed it up to run me out of limbo."

"He was no lieutenant."

"What?"

"I guess we are not on the same tack, shipmate."

"So it seems, so suppose we go into stays and start fresh on the same tack."

"I am willing; but of what lieutenant do you speak?"

"Who fixed up this job to get me off?"

"A young friend of mine whom I had known years ago."

"He was an officer, was he not, in the king's navy?"

"No; he was a mere lad."

"The devil you say."

"Yes; he came to me, offered me good terms to desert and help you off, and I accepted, for I put into any port where there's the best trade."

"Ah, I see; well, I guess he was working for my friend, and as it is, it's all right."

"How do you head after we reach Portland?"

"With the wind, for it's too hard work beating against it."

"You mean whichever way pays best?"

"Yes."

"Then I guess I'll be your consort, for that style suits me."

Having by this conversation become a little better acquainted with each other, the two fugitives were most socially inclined, and took turns at the tiller and all other work, until one night, ten days after their departure, just after sunset, the old watch-tower of Portland came in sight.

A stiff breeze was blowing, and Robert Brent seemed anxious to run in at once, under cover of the darkness, and called to his comrade to ask his opinion.

The latter was forward, gazing at the distant lights of the city, but came at the call of Brent, and took a seat in the cockpit by his side.

"Take the tiller one minute, messmate," said Brent, quickly, and rising, he entered the little cabin.

The next instant he returned, and, quick as a flash, brought a heavy blow upon the head of the unsuspecting man who had aided his escape.

Without a groan even he sunk down in the cockpit, and seizing the tiller, Brent luffed sharply up and lay the smack to.

Then, with the cool indifference of a hardened villain, he proceeded to search the pockets of the man he had struck down, after which he tumbled him into the sea, muttering as he did so:

"I like short division, and two were one too many to divide that small sum between."

"After all, with what I get for the smack, I'll not be so badly off."

Once more he got the little craft on its way, and several hours after dropped anchor in the harbor of Portland.

CHAPTER XIII.

PLOT AND COUNTERPLOT.

THE youth referred to as the friend of the soldier who had aided Brent's escape, was none other than Frank, the young ally of St. Vale.

To him the officer had gone and made known that it was important to him not to have Brent tried for the murder of Sir Grey Alstone, and Frank had at once told him that he could arrange his escape, as he had a soldier friend at the guard-house who had once been a seaman with the Black Pirate.

"He is treacherous, and evidently means some devilry in leading the life of a soldier, for he can never repent or reform, and it would be a good idea for your man to get rid of him as soon as he has aided his escape," said the youth.

This St. Vale took literally, and the reader has seen the result of the hint thrown out to Robert Brent by him, in regard to getting rid of the soldier.

It was Frank who had bought and stored the little smack, and arranged all the preliminaries of the successful escape, so that Leon St. Vale was not known in the matter, and when he had seen the two men go on board and set sail, he had returned to his quarters at the inn delighted in having served the lieutenant.

At an early hour the following morning St. Vale went on deck, to at once discover that there was some cause of excitement in the town.

The brigantine had been hauled into the yard for repairs, and he saw the marine on duty halt two officers who were coming on board.

Instantly he called to him to allow them to pass.

It was the officer of the day and an aide, and he quickly informed St. Vale that the prisoner had escaped by the aid of a soldier who had deserted his post, and asked that the brigantine go at once in pursuit, for there was a small smack seen to leave the harbor at night, but supposed to be a fishing craft, no notice was taken of its departure by the guard-boats.

St. Vale regretted that the brigantine was in such a condition as to be unfit to start, but promised to row at once on board the Vulture and see if Sir Roslyn Stannix could not go in chase, though he feared not, as the brig was also undergoing repairs.

The officer thanked St. Vale and departed for the purpose of further prosecuting the search for the fugitives ashore, and shortly after the lieutenant was rowed to the Vulture.

Sir Roslyn, when not on duty, was by no means an early riser, and it was half an hour before he was presentable, and then St. Vale discovered from him that it would be impossible for the Vulture to give chase, and to send the Petrel, after her long cruise as the Gallows Ship, was out of the question.

At last, however, a crew from the Vulture was made up and placed on board a merchant schooner, under Kent Lomax, and started in pursuit, that young officer being exceedingly anxious to win favor in the eyes of Eve by recapturing the supposed murderer of her loved father.

But when the schooner put to sea the smack had just twelve hours' start, and two days after Lomax returned, as the reader knows, wholly unsuccessful.

The town went wild over the strange escape of the murderer, and large rewards were offered by the authorities for his recapture and that of the marine who had aided him.

But it was of no avail, and Sir Grey Alstone was borne to his grave, with Lady Eve leaning on the arm of Leon St. Vale, following close behind the coffin.

Then came Lena La Rue and Lord Cecil Milnor, Sir Roslyn Stannix and the officers of the vessels of war, and a long line of mourners that made it a grand and solemn pageant.

And around the grave stood the vast assemblage, little dreaming that the tall, splendid-looking officer in his brilliant uniform, gazing

so calmly down into the grave, was the one by whose hand Sir Grey had died.

Nor did Lady Eve, clinging in the abandon of grief to Leon St. Vale, feel that the hand she grasped had laid her father in his grave.

Over the city fell a pall of gloom after the funeral, for Sir Grey Alstone had spent his money freely, had made many friends during his short sojourn there, and his lovely daughter was admired by all and loved by many, and they felt that the grand old mansion must no longer echo with merry laughter, and shed radiance upon the more humble homes around it.

As though the tax upon his nerves had been fearful, to play the part he did, St. Vale, after escorting Eve back to her desolate home, hastened away.

But instead of going on board the brigantine to push the work of repairs, as he had said, he sought the inn where dwelt the sailor lad, Frank.

He found him in his lonely room, and was greeted with a smile of welcome.

"Frank, the schooner in which sailed Lieutenant Lomax, in chase of the smack, is coming up the harbor, and of course is unsuccessful in her search.

"But you be down at the landing and find out, and if the fugitives are captured, bring me word here at once.

"If not, seek Lomax, and tell him that Brent told you to come to him to perform a certain work, which his hasty departure would not permit, and intimate that you know what it is, and will do it yourself for a consideration."

"I understand, sir. Get him to commit himself, you mean?"

"Yes; and make him compromise himself some way in writing, and bring it to me, for there is a little game afoot that I must head off."

The youth put on his disguise and hastily departed, and as the schooner dropped anchor, he boarded her in a shore boat, and found Kent Lomax just preparing to start for the town to make his report.

CHAPTER XIV.

ENTRAPPED.

"CAN I see you a moment, Lieutenant Lomax?" asked Frank, addressing that officer, politely, as he was about to go into his boat to row ashore.

Kent Lomax was in no amiable mood, for he had returned unsuccessful in his search, and had not the anticipated pleasure of telling Lady Eve that he had recaptured the murderer of her father.

"No; I care not to be bothered now," was the abrupt reply.

Nettled at the response, Frank retorted sharply:

"As you please, sir; there may be others who would willingly hear what I have to say, although you are the most interested."

The tone was significant of having something back of it, and Kent Lomax realized this by one glance into the youth's face, and changing his manner, said:

"If your business with me is important, await my return from the shore, where I go to make my report."

"It is important, sir, and I will wait," and the youth paced to and fro with the steady tread of one accustomed to walk the deck.

In half an hour's time Kent Lomax returned, and motioned to the waiting lad to accompany him into the cabin, while he gave an under officer orders to have the men ready to leave the schooner to return to the Vulture, which was anchored a mile away.

"Well, sir, what is it you want?" he said abruptly, when the two were alone in the cabin.

"I suppose you know that the murderer of Sir Grey Alstone was your man, Robert Brent?" said the youth boldly.

Kent Lomax paled slightly at this abrupt assertion, and asked evasively:

"My man! What do you mean?"

"I am his messmate, and as he had to up anchor and run, he could not carry out your plans, so sent me to do the work."

"What work?" gasped the lieutenant.

"No need of backing and filling in that way, lieutenant, for I've got the whole course down that Brent was to sail, and as he is away, I'm sent by him to do the business he left undone."

"Did he tell you what our business together was?" asked the officer.

"He told me that there was a rival in the way that wanted to be removed, and that you would pay well for it."

"Who are you?"

"A messmate of Brent's."

"You are young enough to be his son."

"Perhaps I am his son."

"Ah! What is your name?"

"Frank."

"And do you, a boy in years, think you can accomplish what he offered to do?"

"Yes."

"And your price?"

"The same that you intended to give him."

"I had already paid him some little."

"Look to him, then, for that."

"Well, I'll pay you well if you do the work."

"I'll do it."

"You know what it is?"

"Yes; to kill Lieutenant Leon St. Vale."

"True. When will you do it?"

"At the first opportunity."

"Then come to me and get your pay."

"I must have some guarantee that I will get it."

"I give you my word."

"It is not good."

"What! do you dare—"

"I dare say, sir, that a man who plots the death of a brother officer will do anything."

"By Heaven! I have half a mind to—"

"You had better not get a whole mind to attempt any reckless act."

"This is business between us, and you pay me for work you fear to do yourself, and I want a guarantee that it will be paid," said the lad, boldly.

"What kind of a guarantee?"

"A written one."

"No. I care not to put my name to any document that may implicate me."

"It will be a simple note of hand, promising to pay a stated sum to Sailor Frank, for proof of certain services rendered."

"Very well; I'll give it to you, for I am most anxious that St. Vale shall be removed at once," and, turning to a writing desk, Kent Lomax committed himself to paper as the youth dictated, and handed it to him.

"Now, my lad, I am working to get this matter off my hands at once, and if you lose no time I will add a bonus to the amount promised you."

"I'll do what I have to do at once, sir," was the quiet answer, and, armed with the compromising document, the lad took his leave and returned to his room in the Anchor Inn.

CHAPTER XV.

A DEMOLISHED AIR CASTLE.

Two weeks passed away after the death of Sir Grey Alstone, and yet the worthy citizens of Halifax, with the army and navy officers stationed there, found it a subject of fruitful conversation and more than a nine days' wonder.

The gossips had met with a sore disappointment, for they had planned that Lady Eve was to become Mrs. Leon St. Vale, and that Lena La Rue would certainly marry the handsome Lord Milnor.

Things had certainly been tending in that direction, to all appearances, the public not seeing behind the scenes, when the tragic death of the baronet broke in upon all the plans of the gossips, and put a damper upon the town.

Lady Eve, now that her father was dead, determined to return at once to England, and gave out as her intention to live at Castle Curse, her inheritance from her uncle, Alvin Alstone.

Since the death of her father she had been strangely moody, refusing to see all visitors, even to Leon St. Vale, and busying herself with her arrangements for her departure.

As no packet-ship was to sail soon, she had obtained permission to take passage on the schooner in which Kent Lomax had started in pursuit of the smack, and which was a fast craft, used as a Government dispatch vessel, and which was to be sent to England with dispatches from the colonies, and a certain amount of treasure paid to the king by the provinces.

The admiral of the British fleet then anchored in the St. Lawrence gulf had ordered Captain Sir Roslyn Stannix to put a crew on board the schooner, under an efficient officer, and at once send the craft to England with the important dispatches and treasure he forwarded by special messenger.

In his kindness of heart Sir Roslyn offered to Lady Eve this opportunity to return to her friends in England, and would have been glad to detail Leon St. Vale for the duty of carrying the vessel over.

But the brigantine was now ready for sea, and it was important that she should sail for the Gulf and Caribbees just as soon as her crew could be shipped, and, not knowing the feeling of rivalry between Kent Lomax and St. Vale, he ordered the latter to prepare to take command of the dispatch vessel.

This was a most delightful surprise for Kent Lomax, when he learned that Lady Eve Alstone was to be placed under his especial care, and he began building castles high in the air of future happiness, for he expected daily to be told that Leon St. Vale was dead, and then he would have the way clear before him to win the maiden's heart and fortune.

But Leon St. Vale heard the news with far different feelings from what his rival did, and at once he determined to act to prevent it.

Several times he had been on the eve of laying the case of the treachery of Kent Lomax before Sir Roslyn; but then he feared he would have to bring Frank up, and tell all about the boy, and some unpleasant questions might be asked about his finding out the plot of Robert Brent to kill him, instigated by Lomax, and he had deferred making it known until he could see his way more clearly.

Now, with Eve, who had persistently refused to see him when he had called, to go to England under the escort of Kent Lomax, was more than he could stand, and at once he set to work to thwart it, and, as usual, sought the aid of his youthful ally, Frank.

Kent Lomax had repaired on board the schooner as soon as he had received orders to take command, and soon had all in readiness to sail.

The luggage of Lady Eve had come on board, and the maiden and her two English servants were expected that afternoon, for the schooner was to sail by sunset.

Captain Cuthbert, the unfortunate commander of the Petrel, when captured by the Black Pirate, had also taken advantage of the schooner's going to return home, having fully recovered from his wounds, had gone on board and been assigned a state-room by Kent Lomax, who could hardly contain himself with joy at the prospect before him of being so long in Eve's sweet society.

As he paced the deck impatiently, watching the shore, he saw a small boat coming out to the schooner, and in it recognized, with a start, the sailor lad, Frank.

"I would like to see you, sir," said the youth, as the officer met him at the gangway.

"Then come into my cabin, and—"

"No, Lieutenant Lomax, you accompany me ashore," and the youth spoke firmly.

"No, for I expect Lady Eve Alstone on board any moment, and sail at dark."

"You asked me to do some work for you, so come and see if it is done."

"Ha! you have—"

"Sh—! come with me, lieutenant, and you shall know all."

The manner of the lad impressed Kent Lomax, and leaving the vessel in charge of an under officer, he sprang into the boat and was rowed ashore.

Instead of landing, as the officer had expected he would at the town, Frank headed for the wooded point under the cliff on which stood the Alstone mansion, now gloomy in its desolation.

"Why do you go here, my lad?"

"The one I wish you to see is there, sir."

"Ah! St. Vale?"

"Yes, sir."

"And he is dead?" eagerly asked the officer.

"You will see the result of my work, sir, and I hope you have the money with you," was the somewhat evasive reply.

"Yes, and the bonus I promised you; but it will rob me of all I have, though I have prospects," and the lieutenant smiled, as he thought of Eve and her inheritance.

"But why did you kill him here, my lad, where people are liable to come?"

"It was a good place to decoy him to, and I am content with the risk I take; but here we are."

As the skiff touched the shore the youth sprang out, and Kent Lomax followed him.

Crossing the beach the lad led the way into a pine thicket that grew on the hillside, and Kent Lomax started back as he was suddenly

confronted by three persons whom he knew well.

One was Leon St. Vale, calm and stern, the other Lord Cecil Milnor, a wondering expression upon his face, and the third the surgeon of the Vulture.

In some way Kent Lomax at once realized that he had been entrapped, and he turned deadly pale, scowling upon the youth who had brought him there, and not returning the bow of the three officers before him.

He had expected to find Leon St. Vale, but dead before him; he found him facing him in perfect health, and with a look upon his face that he neither liked, nor could fathom.

CHAPTER XVI.

A LOTTERY OF LIFE AND DEATH.

FOR an instant Kent Lomax was considerably nonplused, but recovering himself he quickly said:

"Good-afternoon, gentlemen, and I may also say good-by, as I sail shortly for England, as you know."

"Kent Lomax, it will be a long good-by that either you or I speak, for one of us must not leave this spot alive," said Leon St. Vale in his deep, stern tones.

The man addressed turned very pale, and both Lord Cecil and the surgeon seemed deeply surprised; but Frank looked indifferent and calm.

"I—I do not understand our cause of quarrel, Lieutenant St. Vale," faltered Lomax.

"You are mistaken, sir, for you do understand it, though these gentlemen do not, and there is no reason that they should, unless you make it known to them."

"I asked them to come here with me for a particular purpose, though I did not explain why."

"You came here for a purpose I care not to make known; but, in the presence of Lord Cecil Milnor, and Surgeon Lester Van Loo, I desire to ask you if you wrote this document."

He took from his pocket as he spoke a piece of paper, the same which the officer had given Frank the sailor as a guarantee of payment for the killing of St. Vale.

One glance at it, and, recognizing the fatal paper, he snatched it from the hand of Leon St. Vale and attempted to destroy it.

But, with the spring of a panther, Leon St. Vale was upon him, and grasping his hands as they were about to tear the tell-tale document, in a gripe that made Kent Lomax cry out with pain, he took the paper from his grasp, while he said contemptuously:

"I need no reply, sir, for your actions have proven you the author of that agreement, and there is but one course now for you to pursue to extricate yourself."

"And what is that?" hoarsely said Kent Lomax, who was wild with passion.

"Take your stand ten paces from me, armed with one of these weapons," and Leon St. Vale stepped to where his cloak lay upon the grass, and took up two dueling pistols.

"I want no quarrel with you, St. Vale," huskily said Kent Lomax, while Doctor Van Loo and Lord Milnor looked on with cool surprise.

"Therein we differ, sir, for I seek a quarrel with you."

"One of these pistols is loaded, the other is not, and you can take your choice, have the first fire, and walk up to me and place the muzzle against my heart, and draw the trigger."

"If luck favors you, you remove me from your path."

"If luck goes against you, it is my turn."

Kent Lomax felt that he was fairly caught, and though he could not but thank St. Vale for giving him even chances with him, after the discovery of his plot against him, and also for not revealing the conspiracy he had entered into to kill him, he yet hated him fiendishly, and jumped at the chance to slay him.

Of course he knew he had to take the chance of getting an unloaded weapon, but that was not so great as if they both faced each other with bullets in their pistols, for then St. Vale, who never missed, would be certain to kill him.

"I accept your terms, sir, as you seem determined to force this duel upon me," he said huskily.

"You have no complaint, sir, as I keep the cause a secret," was the biting retort of St. Vale.

Kent Lomax approached and attentively regarded the two weapons.

They were both alike, long, deadly looking

weapons, and upon one he saw engraven the date of Lord Caverly's death, and his name.

"That is the one that served him well before, and he would surely load that one," said Lomax to himself, while Lord Cecil and the surgeon glanced curiously on, and Frank yet maintained his cool indifference of manner.

He saw that both weapons were primed, and the flints in place, and longed to be able to pierce the iron tube and see in which rested the deadly bullet.

First he took up one, then the other, and then seized the weapon that had slain Lord Caverly. St. Vale's face was emotionless, and he said with perfect calmness:

"Is that one your selection, sir?"

"It is, sir; do you know which one contains the bullet?"

"I do not."

"And yet one is engraven with a date and a name?"

"Yes, the date of my duel with poor Caverly," was the unmoved reply.

"I should think, though the pistols are fac-similes of each other, that the date would show you—"

"I loaded them, sir, in the dark, to avoid knowing."

"You may have the loaded one, and you may not."

"But soon you will know."

Kent Lomax shuddered slightly at the portentous words, and walked to his place, while he said:

"Who gives the word to fire?"

"There need be no word, sir; take your stand, walk toward me, and draw trigger when you see fit."

"I care not to interest these gentlemen in this affair, other than to see by your own confession, that I have ample cause of quarrel with you."

"But you have no proof—"

"Silence, or I shall make all known, and yonder youth shall—"

"No, no, I will meet you," quickly interrupted Lomax, and he walked to the spot designated by St. Vale, who also took his stand.

When the two faced each other, St. Vale calmly said:

"Lieutenant Kent Lomax, I am ready to face the ordeal of life and death."

There was not the slightest tremor of tone, not even did the flush of health on his cheeks die away, and his hand, holding the pistol, was as firm as the rock by which he stood.

With a murderous glitter in his eyes Kent Lomax began his advance.

Slowly he made his steps, and halted within three feet of St. Vale.

Then he deliberately raised his weapon, first to his face, and the muzzle was within two inches of his eyes.

But not a sign of fear did he cause to cross that stern, handsome face, and with disappointment plainly visible upon his own countenance, he slowly lowered the weapon until it pointed directly at the heart.

"Lieutenant Lomax, I must say, sir, that for an officer and a gentleman you are showing a refined cruelty unworthy of one of your rank," said Lord Cecil Milnor, sternly, and he stepped forward.

"And I agree with my Lord Milnor," put in Surgeon Van Loo.

"If he enjoys it, let him alone," was St. Vale's remark.

Seeing that he was losing caste with his brother officers, Kent Lomax placed the muzzle of the pistol against the broad breast of his foe, and drew the trigger.

The powder flashed in the pan, and there was no explosion.

Kent Lomax had drawn the wrong weapon.

CHAPTER XVII.

LEON ST. VALE'S REVENGE.

"Now, I believe, it is my turn, Lieutenant Kent Lomax."

Leon St. Vale spoke with the utmost sangfroid of manner, and the one he addressed became as livid as thought life had already left his body.

"I care not to kill you, for you are not worth the remembrance of the act, but I will prevent your going to sea as the commander of the schooner which your connivance has made you captain of."

Stepping backward, to the spot where Kent Lomax had stood, ten paces, distance, St. Vale continued in his quiet way:

"Surgeon Van Loo, I will put my mark on this man, and leave him in your charge."

At the last word the pistol flashed and Kent Lomax spun half round, as though on a pivot, tottered, gave a cry of pain and rage commingled, and would have fallen had not Lester Van Loo sprung forward and caught him.

"You have shattered his left arm, St. Vale," cried Lord Cecil.

"Such was my intention, my lord; there is my boat for you to pull him on board the Vulture, where he can receive every care, and I will go and report to Captain Sir Roslyn," was the cool reply.

The surgeon and Lord Cecil bore the wounded man to the boat, and Frank seized the oars and rowed them out to the Vulture, while St. Vale walked down to the town and going on board the brigantine made a written report, of his affair with Kent Lomax, to Sir Roslyn Stannix, whose first act was to look up a commander for the schooner, whose departure at once was urgent, on account of the dispatches it was to carry.

To send St. Vale was out of the question, and Lord Cecil Milnor could not be spared, so Sir Roslyn went on board the schooner and begged Captain Cuthbert, of the unfortunate Petrel, to take command, which he gladly consented to do under the circumstances, as his wounds were almost wholly healed.

The consequence was that, Lady Eve having gone on board, accompanied by Lena La Rue, who intended to make the voyage with her, and return to New York in a packet ship from London, the schooner spread her sails and darted down the harbor, saluted by the brigantine, Petrel and Vulture, as she passed, and upon which latter vessel lay Kent Lomax, groaning with pain and cursing St. Vale with every breath, and laying up a bitter revenge in his heart against him, for the wound he had given him, and the manner in which he had thwarted him from becoming the protector of Lady Eve in her trip home.

Shortly after the sailing of the schooner, a boat from the Vulture boarded the brigantine, and a midshipman handed to Leon St. Vale a letter.

It read:

"ON BOARD HIS MAJESTY'S
"Brig-of-war Vulture,
"Thursday evening."

"TO LIEUT. LEON ST. VALE, commanding brigantine-of-war 'Black Pirate.'"

"Sir—your report of your duel with Lieutenant Kent Lomax, your brother officer in His Majesty's service is at hand, and in answer I would say that with the following day you surrender command of the brigantine to Lieutenant Lord Cecil Milnor, and repair on board the Vulture, to answer to the Admiral of the North Atlantic Squadron, when he arrives in port, for forcing a meeting with an officer detached for special service, just as he was about to proceed upon that duty. Yours with respect,

"SIR ROSLYN STANNIX,
"Captain His Majesty's service, and commanding British fleet in Halifax waters."

"Say to Sir Roslyn, Midshipman Dale, that I will obey his orders, as soon as Lord Cecil comes on board," he said quietly to the young midshipman, who then took his departure.

When alone in his cabin Leon St. Vale began to pace to and fro and think over what had happened.

That Kent Lomax was his bitter foe there could be no manner of doubt, after all he knew of his plot against him, and his conscience cleared him of the punishment he had inflicted upon him.

He did not care to make known the real wickedness of Lomax, on account of the aged parents of the erring officer, and the honor of the service, and he would do all he could to clear himself without compromising him for those reasons.

He had felt hurt by Lady Eve's refusal to see him, after the burial of her father, and had attributed it to Kent Lomax, and he was determined to prevent his carrying to sea the schooner with her under his protection, and he had done so, and must take the consequences, be they what they might.

Worried by the order relieving him of the command of the brigantine, which his skill and nerve had captured, he went on deck to cool his heated brow.

He found that a storm was coming up, for the heavens were black with clouds, and the thunder rolled incessantly, while every now and then vivid lightning illumined the scene.

The brigantine had been prepared to meet the blow, by the officer in charge of the deck, and the half score of seamen on board were indolently leaning over the forward bulwarks looking at the approaching storm.

Charmed with the grandeur of the scene Leon St. Vale stood watching the inky clouds, rent in twain by seams of fire, until the tempest burst with unbridled fury upon the town and harbor.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE MYSTERIOUS DISAPPEARANCE.

ALL through the night the storm raged furiously, and the vessels in the harbor tugged viciously at their chain cables, as though impatient of restraint, and anxious to fly away upon the gale.

But at dawn the inky clouds swept away and the sun rose clear and rosy out of the sea and cast its rays over the harbor and town.

Then there arose a cry of alarm from many a deck, for nowhere was the brigantine visible. Had she foundered in the blow and sunk from sight?

No, that could not be, for her masts would have been surely visible.

Had she broken her cables and been driven ashore?

No, for though there was a schooner on the beach near the town, and a wrecked fishing-smack or two, there were no others.

Perhaps she had at any rate been compelled to slip her cable and drive before the storm to escape the drifting schooner, which must have gone near her; but why, if this was the case, was she not seen standing up the harbor to her anchorage again?

Sir Roslyn and his officers vainly consulted over the mysterious disappearance, and could arrive at no conclusion.

In the cabin where they sat lay Kent Lomax, his shattered arm giving him great pain, in spite of the skillful dressing it had received at the hands of Surgeon Van Loo, and suddenly from his white lips came the words, viciously uttered:

"Perhaps St. Vale has put the brigantine to her old trade."

"What!" cried Sir Roslyn in angry surprise.

"Gone to pirating in her."

"Never! St. Vale is a man of honor, and, though I do not uphold him in his affair with you—"

"On the moment of your departure on special duty," put in Lord Cecil, with a bow of apology to Sir Roslyn for the interruption.

"Yes, on the eve of your starting on special service, I yet will not hear you slander him, Lomax, in that way."

"I beg pardon, Sir Roslyn, but as you told me you were to relieve Leon St. Vale of his command, and he had before been strangely associated with pirates, added to the unaccountable disappearance of the brigantine from her anchorage, I cannot but find excuse for my remark," said Lomax, with a groan of pain.

"Well, sir, your remark loses you my sympathy in your affair with St. Vale, who, it seems, was generous enough not to make the cause of your quarrel known, while you were forced to admit that he had cause."

"Surgeon Van Loo, as Lieutenant Lomax is invalided and not on duty, please remove him to his own quarters, where a council of myself and officers will in nowise retard his speedy recovery."

Kent Lomax saw that he had made a great mistake; but, as excuses would but make matters worse, he remained silent, and was soon after removed to his own state-room, which was by no means the pleasant quarters he had found the captain's cabin.

He had expected, as Sir Roslyn had taken a firm stand against St. Vale, that he could say what he pleased, and his disappointment and humiliation in this respect, but added to his more intense hatred of the man who had wounded him.

From the look-out on the hills no sign of the brigantine could be seen coming into the harbor or at sea, and wonder grew in intensity as the hours passed and she did not appear.

Then a merchant captain, anchored down the harbor came on board the Vulture, and reported that the brigantine had driven by him shortly after midnight, with storm-sails set, and her deck crowded with men.

What this could mean no one could conjecture.

She had had not a dozen men on board, although a crew was being shipped for her; but a visit to the shipping agent proved that his men were all on shore.

With this information, Sir Roslyn determined to act at once, and he ordered the

Petrel into the dock for repairs and refitting, and at once repaired on board his own vessel and stood to sea.

All the town gazed upon the pretty brig as she sped away like the wind, and wondered what news she would bring back of the missing brigantine.

With the following morning there came a shot from the fort as a signal that a vessel-of-war was standing into the harbor, and those who at once thronged the bluffs beheld the Vulture coming back before a stiff breeze, and having in tow the Dispatch Schooner, whose foremast was shot away, and bulwarks torn with the iron hail that had been poured upon her.

But the brigantine was not with them, or in sight astern of them, and conjecture ran wild again as to what had become of her.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE MYSTERY SOLVED.

UNTIL the storm broke upon the harbor, did Leon St. Vale face the deck of the brigantine; but the rude elements at last drove him to his cabin, for he had not on his storm suit, and he threw himself upon the luxurious divan upon which the fierce Black Pirate had so often stretched his huge limbs, and continued his painful reveries.

At last he sunk to sleep; but was awakened by heavy feet on deck.

At first he believed that the brigantine had broken her cables and was drifting ashore, and he sprung to his feet to rush on deck.

But then he heard the tread of a hundred feet, and knew that other than his few crew made the sounds.

He turned to seize his cutlass and belt of arms, when down the companionway bounded a huge form, and a pistol was held to his head, while there came the deep, threatening tones:

"Lieutenant St. Vale, you are my prisoner, dead or alive."

He saw that he was fairly entrapped, for he had not his arms in hand, and behind his captor stood a dozen fierce men.

"You are Captain Ebony, the Black Pirate, whom I believed at the bottom of the sea," he said, coolly.

The man was a giant in size, for he was nearly seven feet tall, broad-shouldered, and wore a mask, while he was clad in a pair of white duck pants, heavy pea-jacket and tarpaulin, all drenched by the rain.

"Yes, I am Ebony, the Pirate, whose craft you so skillfully took from him by chasing him ashore with the vessel he had turned into a Gallows Ship."

"I was a superstitious fool then, to fly from my own deadly work, but I am wiser now, and having escaped death by drowning when you forced me to beach this craft, I'll this night set sail and show the world that the Black Pirate is afloat again."

"Come, give me your parole not to attempt to escape, and I will give you the freedom of the cabin until we get to sea, and not put you in irons, as I should do; for, Leon St. Vale, I have not forgotten the clever way in which you hoaxed me by playing pirate, and I should kill you."

"Do you intend to run the brigantine out to sea?" asked St. Vale.

"I do. Your crew are in irons, with the exception of two officers, the one who was on deck and the other we found in the ward-room, and they are dead for resisting; they were cut down, with one or two of the men."

"I have half a hundred good fellows on board, enlisted for a lawless cruise, and the storm aids me to run out, so if you do not care to die, you will give me your parole not to escape."

"I give it," said St. Vale, without an instant of hesitation.

"Good! Now remain in my cabin until I come and free you, for I have work on deck now."

The pirate chief and his men left the cabin and St. Vale was alone, and his thoughts were bitter indeed, for he did not doubt but that he would be killed by the Black Pirate.

He had given his parole not to escape, and yet was it binding to keep such word to a sea-monster, who was then going to again enter upon a red life upon the ocean?

No; he would escape if in his power, swim to the brig-of-war Vulture, and cut the brigantine off ere she could run out, or follow her to sea.

He went to the companionway, but found it locked on the outside.

Although accepting his parole, the Black Pirate had mistrusted him.

He went to the door leading forward, and it, too, was locked.

There was then no alternative, for he must submit to his fate.

As he stood in painful thought, he felt the brigantine lean to the breeze, and the motion told him that she was under way and heading toward the open water at a terrific speed.

For an hour he sat, for the motion of the vessel in the rough waters prevented his pacing the cabin, and then the companionway opened, and the Black Pirate was before him.

Leon St. Vale had hoped that the brig-of-war or the fort would spy the brigantine running out, and bring her to; if unable to do this, come on in chase.

But there was no heavy gun mingling with the artillery of heaven, to show that she was discovered, and he knew that the daring buccaneer chief had well chosen his time, and was safely at sea, and that all hope for him was over.

But with a bold, fearless mien, he met the Black Pirate when he came into the cabin and calmly threw himself upon the divan, in front of where the young king's officer sat.

CHAPTER XX.

THE PIRATE AND THE KING'S OFFICER.

THE pirate chief sat in silence for some time before St. Vale, eying him closely, while the young officer also gazed upon him with deep interest, if nothing more.

He saw not the chief's face, for that was masked, and the hands were covered with heavy gauntlet-gloves; but he knew well the large form and deep voice, as he remembered them.

"That was a bold act of yours, St. Vale, coming on board of my vessel that night, from the Vulture, to play spy upon me," said the chief, opening the conversation.

"You are mistaken, for I did not come to play the part of a spy."

"We were becalmed a long way off from your vessel, which we took for a trim American trader, and I rowed on board of you to find out what you were."

"Discovering too late just what you were, and not wishing to be slain with the boat's crew, I sent them back to the brig, and played a part before you, pretending to be a disgraced officer."

"And you played it well; but in Heaven's name how did you escape?"

"I saw a small craft lying to inshore that night of storm, and let myself go overboard with the wave that carried off some of your crew."

"I reached the craft, regained my own vessel, was captured in an attack on one of your boats that pursued a prisoner from your island in the Caribbees, and again played a successful part with your men there."

"But in the Devil's name how did you come to board that Gallows Ship?" asked the chief, evidently deeply interested in the story of the young officer.

"I left your island in your old schooner, with your own crew, and it went down in a gale, and we took to the boats."

"My boat survived and I came upon the Gallows Ship, just as a storm was upon us, boarded her, found Captain Cuthbert and one other of her crew, your victims, on board alive, and wounded, and rerigging her went in search of you, feeling assured that your guilty conscience would cause you to fly when you saw the Death Ship pursuing you."

"And I thought right, for I scared you and your crew almost to death," and St. Vale laughed.

"By Heaven! you did indeed, and I can now join in your laugh, as I know the trick, and have my brigantine back again; but that night I beached the craft, and we all sprung into the sea, preferring to be drowned to being taken by what we all believed a ship load of ghosts."

"Ha! ha! ha! it was a good joke for you, but I did not relish it then, though, as I reached the shore, I can do so now."

"But tell me, where are my guests that were wont to occupy my cabin?"

"You refer to the skeletons you were wont to have sit at your table?"

"Yes."

"I had them sent ashore and given honorable burial."

"Ah! that was thoughtful of you, St. Vale; but I cannot cruise successfully without skeleton guests in my cabin, so shall have to begin to look for them, though my surgeon who dressed their bones so skillfully, is at the bottom of the sea, or acting as Satan's medical adviser."

"He need not have died to serve Satan," was St. Vale's bold remark.

"True, for you mean that in serving me, he served the Devil."

"That is just what I mean."

"You are complimentary, for I like to be thought a fiend."

"Now tell me, do you want a berth as my first luff on board?"

"I'd as soon serve Satan himself, and the offer is an insult I would resent had I the power," was the angry retort.

"But you have not the power, and I need an officer, for I am in chase of the schooner and have not a single man on board I could make a lieutenant."

"You are a fearless man and a most skillful seaman, and I can make you rich within the year, ay, richer than the fair heiress, Lady Eve, whom you can then marry, swearing that you had been my prisoner all the while and just managed to escape."

"The offer is a tempting one, so think of it."

At the mention of the schooner St. Vale had started, and when the Black Pirate spoke of Eve Alstone, he turned pale, for there was that in the remark that led him to feel that she was not unknown to the monster.

Crushing his feelings, he asked calmly:

"To what schooner do you refer?"

"The Dispatch Schooner."

"What know you of her?"

"That she sailed at dark, with dispatches and treasure, for England."

"What more?"

"That the officer who was to have commanded her was your rival, and, to prevent his going, you shot him in a duel an hour or two before the vessel sailed."

"What else?"

"She went in command of Captain Cuthbert, formerly of the Petrel, which I turned into the Gallows Ship, and whose commander I believed I had killed, with all of his crew."

"And is that all?"

"Oh, no, for the schooner carries on her the fair Lady Eve Alstone, the heiress of Castle Curse, and her intimate friend, the New York heiress and beauty, Miss Lena La Rue, who was once my captive, and whom you rescued from my island retreat."

"You are certainly well informed regarding the schooner and her passengers," sneered St. Vale.

"And don't forget her treasure, which is considerable."

"Yes; I am well informed, and what is more, I know who killed Sir Grey Alstone, and within twenty-four hours the schooner shall be my prize, and Lady Eve shall know all."

"Never! accursed pirate, never!"

The words broke in a shout from Leon St. Vale's lips, and, like a panther springing upon its prey, he threw himself upon the buccaneer chief.

CHAPTER XXI.

A COMBAT WITH GIANTS.

WHOLLY unprepared for the fierce attack, the Black Pirate was taken by surprise entirely, and the iron gripe of Leon St. Vale was upon his throat ere he could resist.

His belt of arms he had thrown aside upon entering the cabin, and neither of the two had a weapon, but the struggle between them became at once savage in the extreme.

St. Vale was just under six feet in height, of a willowy form, with broad shoulders, and muscles of steel, and his strength had been well considered by his comrades as marvelous.

But the Black Pirate was a giant in size, well formed, and was also powerful, while he had never met his match.

But in the king's officer he at once recognized that he had a most dangerous foe, for his fearful blows were skillfully parried with St. Vale's right hand, while the left clutched the enemy's throat with a grasp that could not be broken.

Over and over the two men rolled, knocking the furniture down, and the roar of the wind and waves, and the bounding of the vessel

alone concealing the tremendous battle going on between decks from those above.

For some moments the giants in strength fought, and in vain was it that the Black Pirate, realizing that he had at last met his master, tried to call for help.

The clutch on his throat choked off all utterance, and he felt the grasp tightening, instead of relaxing, which proved to him that his foe was not losing his strength by the continued struggle.

At last he determined to offer terms, if he could do so, but in vain he essayed to speak, for not a word could he utter, and his veins were swelling out like whip-cords and his strength going from him.

The thought of death stared him in the face, and he could see that St. Vale would go on deck, declare what he had done to the newly-shipped crew, who would gladly put the brigantine about for the promised pardon, and he would be revived and hanged.

The thought was horrible for him, and once more he made a savage struggle to shake off his foe, to find it of no avail.

Then his head seemed bursting, his eyes felt as though they were red-hot coals, and his heart throbbed as though it would burst from the body that held it.

Just then there came a blurred form before his eyes, he felt the gripe upon his throat relax, and he saw St. Vale dragged backward and a knife held over his heart.

Though taken wholly at a disadvantage, St. Vale did not lose his presence of mind, nor for a moment think of surrendering, although there was a keen blade threatening him with death.

As quick as lightning in his movements, he struck his assailant full in the face, and, as he fell back under the blow, seized the knife and attempted to wrench it from his hand.

But the one he now had to deal with was little less powerful than the chief, and he was unable to wrest from him the knife, and for the mastery began a second fierce struggle.

And the one he now fought was a being that looked like a monster, almost, with his immense black head, long arms, claw-like hands, heavy body, deformed out of almost the human shape.

He knew him as Congo, the African slave of the Black Pirate, and a being whom all dreaded upon account of his ferocious nature and great strength, added to his readiness to use his knife upon the slightest provocation.

Wearied by his superhuman exertions in his combat with the Black Pirate, St. Vale yet felt that he was the equal of the deformed African, and determined to end the struggle as soon as possible, and rained fierce blows in the savage face that seemed to bewilder his adversary, whose brute strength was unable to at once crush the young officer.

But suddenly there came a clicking sound in his ears, and a cold muzzle was pressed against the back of his head.

"Senor, you are the worst man to handle that either Congo or myself ever met, and I admire you the more for it; but now I will kill you if you do not at once surrender."

The speaker was the Black Pirate, who had quickly rallied, and, rising softly, had seized his pistol and approached the young officer.

Leon St. Vale felt disheartened that after his savage struggle with each of the monsters that it was all for naught; but he was no fool, and was one who believed thoroughly in the adage that while there is life there is hope.

Consequently he answered promptly:

"I yield, chief."

"Congo, you caught a Tartar that time, as I did, for if you had not come as you did he would have had me at his mercy, and then handled you as easily."

"But leave off your fight now, for I command you."

The African readily obeyed, but instead of seeming sullen and to feel bitter hatred against St. Vale, he gazed upon him rather with admiration, and muttered:

"Congo owns two masters now."

"And the Black Pirate one, it seems; by Heaven, St. Vale, you have a whalebone form and your muscles are like steel finely tempered."

"You are a very remarkable man, and I am the more anxious to have you for one of my officers," said the Black Pirate without the slightest sign of resentment in his tone and manner.

"I am no outlaw, chief, to herd with such as you are," was the haughty reply of Leon St.

Vale, who, excepting the disorder of his uniform, bore no traces of his fierce struggle with the giant pirate and his slave.

"You may be glad of the protection of my flag before you die, young sir."

"Once I was an honorable man like you, but I fell at last, and became what you now see me," said the pirate with a sneer.

"That was before you bore the name of the Ocean Vampire, was it not?" coolly said St. Vale.

In an instant the chief was upon his feet, his eyes fairly blazing, his form trembling, while he almost gasped forth:

"Hail you know me?"

"I know that the Ocean Vampire did not die by the hand of a woman, as all believed, and hid his identity when again going to sea, under the name of the Black Pirate," was the calm reply of the young officer.

"You know that do you?" sneered the chief.

"As I know that your powder-burnt face is stained black, and that you have straight hair beneath that wool wig you wear."

"In the name of the holies, how did you know this?"

"That, I care not to tell."

"I can force it from you."

"Try me."

"Leon St. Vale you are a plucky man, and I think the more of you, now that you know what I was, for I do not deny having once swept the seas under the title of the Ocean Vampire."

"Ay, and I shall throw off this accursed mask of a negro, and sink the name of Black Pirate in the old one of Water Vampire."

"Hail ha! ha! how I will make the very sea tremble when it is known that the Vampire rises from the waves and has to do red deeds to carry out the name he once wore and that of the Black Pirate too."

"I tell you, St. Vale, you must be my first officer, and we will amass a fortune within the year and then you can go free to do as you please."

"Sell yourself to me for one year."

"No argument will avail, sir, to make me forget who and what I am," was St. Vale's haughty response.

"Ah! you think so do you?"

"Well, we shall see, Lieutenant Leon St. Vale," and the expression that passed over the face of the chief the young officer did not like, for it spoke of a trap yet to be sprung in which to catch him.

CHAPTER XXII.

FOR HONOR, OR FOR LOVE.

"WHAT do you mean, pirate?"

The question came from St. Vale after a moment of silence between the two; following upon the last remark of the chief significant of future devilry to be developed.

"I will explain to you, lieutenant."

"You remember when we were talking of the Dispatch Schooner?"

"I do."

"It was some word of mine, regarding a fair passenger—here, Congo, don't leave but use your pistol on this very devil, should he attempt to spring upon me, for I am not equal to another struggle of the kind we had awhile since," and the chief interrupted his words to St. Vale to call out to the slave, who seemed about to leave the cabin by the way he had entered it.

He also observed that St. Vale made a threatening motion when he spoke of Lady Eve Alstone.

The young officer smiled at the caution evinced by the Black Pirate, but said simply:

"Now that Congo remains to protect you, chief, pray continue with your story."

"I will, my dear St. Vale."

"I referred to two fair passengers on the schooner, one of whom was your sweet lady-love, the Lady Eve Alstone, the heiress of Castle Curse, and the other Miss La Rue of New York, also an heiress and a beauty."

"Well?" said St. Vale with an air of perfect indifference.

"They being on the schooner, which also bears a treasure, not to speak of my old victim, Captain Cuthbert, sent out especially by the king, in the brig Petrel, to capture and hang me, it is not to be wondered at, that I, Captain Ebony, the Black Pirate, should feel desirous of capturing so valuable a vessel and having her cargo as my own."

"And her captain?" asked St. Vale.

"I shall hang him to the yard-arm of the brigantine."

"And her crew?"

"Must go with their captain."

"The treasure?"

"Must be transferred to the hold of the brigantine."

"The vessel?"

"I will scuttle, or, after a second thought, I will make another Death Ship of her, to show the enemies that not only is the Black Pirate not dead, but the Water Vampire of some years ago has come to life again."

"And her passengers?"

St. Vale asked this last question in the same cool way in which he had put the others, but it was by the greatest effort only that he kept calm.

"To the victor belong the spoils," was the laughing response of the chief, as he fastened his eyes upon his prisoner.

"You would drag those poor maidens down to shame and misery, you mean?" came the question in the same forced tones, that were yet so calm.

"That depends."

"Upon what?"

"Upon you."

"Upon me, chief?"

"Yes."

St. Vale gazed at him in surprise.

"I repeat, what is done with the Lady Eve, Miss La Rue and the servants and riches of the former lady, depends upon you."

"How am I concerned?"

"You love the lady?"

"That is no affair of yours," was the haughty response.

"Granted; yet answer me."

"Why should I?"

"I will explain."

"Yes."

"You hope to marry her?"

"I had hoped to."

"But she has treated you coldly of late?"

"Ha! how know you that?"

"Do you know a seaman by the name of Brent?"

"Robert Brent?"

"Yes."

"I did know such a one."

"Where is he now?"

"I know not."

"He was accused of the murder of Sir Grey Alstone?"

"Yes."

"You know that he was not guilty."

"Ha!" and St. Vale turned slightly pale.

"You know by whose hand Sir Grey Alstone fell; but it was best for Robert Brent to be the scapegoat."

"He escaped, reached Portland alone, for he threw his comrade into the sea according to orders, and met one of my agents there, who told him I was not dead, but wanted a crew for another vessel."

"Brent is a bold man, and disguised as an old farmer, came back to Halifax, sought me out, for he had sailed with me once, and told me his little story."

"I was revengeful against you for the tricks you had played on me, and, anxious to make you one of us, so that you would become as wicked as I am, I wrote a note to the Lady Eve, telling her that you had gotten the man to kill her father to get him out of the way, as he opposed your marriage to her."

"I signed no name to it, but it set her to thinking, as I saw, for I watched matters closely in various disguises which I assumed."

"But she loves you, and a word from you can make all clear, and you can one day make her happy if you will, and the veriest wretch in the world if you will otherwise."

"Still I do not understand," said St. Vale, in a low tone.

"I'll make myself understood, then."

"I'll spare the Lady Eve and her fortune if you'll become my officer."

"Never!"

"Hold! take time to think."

"I care not to think, monster."

"Ask me then what I will do if you refuse?" was the sinister question.

St. Vale started, for the full force of what the pirate meant flashed upon him.

He hated him, yet wanted him for an officer to get his revenge in seeing him dishonored. To force him to this, he intended, through Eve Alstone.

What her fate would be he could readily understand.

To save her he would give his life, his honor.

But, should he yield, what guarantee would he have that the Black Pirate would keep his word?

This he would find out, and to do so he asked as calmly as he could:

"Name your terms, pirate."

"That you become my first officer."

"Well?"

"Take command of the brigantine when we sight the schooner, for we are on the very course she was to take."

"Well?"

"Lead the boarders upon her deck, rob the hold of its treasure, hang the officers and crew in her rigging, and set her adrift."

"I am listening."

"I will then land the Lady Eve and her servants in a small boat, and we can continue on our way."

"Is that all?"

"Yes; don't you think it is enough?"

"I think so. And she is to land and spread the news that I ran off with the brigantine, turned pirate, captured the schooner, and am cruising under the black flag?"

"Yes, that is just it."

"And you threaten her with worse than death if I refuse?"

"I certainly do."

"Well, I have terms to make."

"Name them."

"That you overhaul the schooner and I take command of the brigantine."

"That is what I wish."

"Upon conditions?"

"What are they?"

"That you spare both the Lady Eve and Miss La Rue, and their personal effects."

"Ah!"

"Yes, and the crew on the schooner."

"Yes."

"Which you, or I in your place, can rob of all the king's treasure, which I know amounts to thousands of pounds in gold."

"Well?"

"And permit the schooner to go on her way with her dispatches, and her passengers and crew unharmed."

"I get, then, only the treasure?"

"Yes, and one other thing, which you seem to overlook."

"What is that?"

"Your revenge upon me."

"By Heaven, you are right! for you go branded before your king and country as a pirate," eagerly said the chief.

"Yes."

Both were silent for a moment, and then said the Black Pirate:

"You will not demand that I give up my revenge upon Captain Cuthbert?"

"Yes."

"And his crew?"

"Most certainly."

"And the ransom of Miss La Rue?"

"I do make such demands."

"And if I refuse?"

"Then, by the Lord above, you can do your worst, and I will die as I am, a man of honor, be the fate of Eve Alstone and the others what it may."

St. Vale spoke in a tone and with a manner that there was no mistaking as being in deadly earnest, and the Black Pirate realized it fully, and said:

"Well, St. Vale, I agree with your terms."

"Sail ho!"

The gruff cry came from Congo, who repeated it as coming from the deck.

"The schooner is in sight, sir, and dead ahead."

The speaker appeared in the companionway, and it was Robert Brent.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A SAD SURPRISE.

THE storm that came on the night of the Dispatch Schooner's departure, and during which the brigantine escaped under the daring Black Pirate, caught the former vessel a few leagues out from the harbor.

Captain Cuthbert saw that he was to have a blow, and accordingly got all in ship-shape to meet it, while he sent down to the cabin for both Lady Eve and Lena La Rue to come on deck and see the grandeur of the rising tempest, and regardless, or forgetful of the danger it might bring to them, they stood watching the coming tempest with feelings of sublime admiration.

But, though the schooner was bounding along at a merry pace, the storm was flying in pursuit with fearful speed, and soon overtook the gallant vessel.

She stood the shock well, and then drove before it, like an arrow shot from the bow, both maidens remaining on deck against remonstrance, and enjoying greatly the splendid sight of a storm at sea.

When it grew late the maidens went below to the snug cabin, and sat talking together over their past.

They were certainly very beautiful in face and form, and with characters that were equally as lovely.

Eve was a blonde, with liquid blue eyes, and Lena La Rue a brunette with gloriously dark orbs and hair like night.

The sorrows of the latter were now as a dream to her, as she recalled her capture at sea and life upon the pirate island with her invalid mother, her stay there for weary weeks, the death of her poor mother and burial on that lonely isle, and her rescue by Leon St. Vale, the shipwreck, and the cruise in the Death Ship.

But she had learned to love, when she met Lord Cecil Milner, also a prisoner upon the island, and since then her dreams of happiness gave a silver lining to the sorrows she had known, and she looked forward to one day becoming his wife, as she left America pledged to him.

On the other hand, Eve Alstone had made Leon St. Vale her idol, and in spite of her father's sins, which she could not overlook, she had been devoted to him.

The latter, she had found, after his death, had been an unworthy agent of her affairs, and had squandered her riches with a reckless hand, and at a rate that would, had he continued in charge of her fortune, in a few years have made her a beggar, or little more.

Then the seeds of distrust had been sown in her heart against St. Vale, by the letter she had received, anonymous though it was, and the insinuations constantly cast upon her lover by Lieutenant Lomax, could not fail of effecting their purpose of making her think there must be something wrong.

When, at the last moment, the news came that Leon St. Vale had severely wounded Kent Lomax in a duel, she was indeed wretched, and it was with almost a relief, that she gazed upon the rapidly receding shores of America, and felt that she could at least find rest in England until time would make all things even.

It was after midnight before the two maidens retired, and they were awakened shortly after dawn by an unusual commotion on deck, of hurrying feet, stern orders, and then they felt that the schooner was being driven ahead under a tremendous pressure of canvas for the breeze that was blowing, for the wind yet held very fresh, though the storm had passed away.

Hastily dressing they went on deck and glanced around them.

The sea was running rough, and yet the skies were clear, though there was a ten-knot breeze blowing, and the schooner had all her canvas set that would draw.

Glancing astern they discovered a league distant a vessel apparently in chase, for she was crowded with canvas from deck to truck, and her bows raised walls of foam upon either side, showing, as sailors say, that she was carrying a huge bone between her teeth as she came on at a terrific speed.

Just then Captain Cuthbert limped up, and greeted them kindly, and in an assumed tone of cheerfulness, as they at once saw, when they gazed at his pale and anxious face.

"What is the matter, captain?" asked Lady Eve.

"Oh, we have a friend in sight with whom we are racing," was his evasive reply.

"That looks like the brigantine; I mean the craft taken from the Black Pirate," said Lena La Rue, who was no mean sailor.

"It is, Miss La Rue."

"Then why are we flying from her, captain?" asked Eve.

"I said we were racing, young ladies."

"Is it safe to strain the schooner this way for a race?" asked Lena, as she noted that the little vessel was staggering under the canvas she carried.

"And why should you not wait, captain, until the brigantine comes up, as she may bear dispatches that arrived after our departure?" queried Eve, ere the captain could reply to Lena La Rue's question.

The old seaman seemed in a quandary, for he was being catechised by two fair cross-examiners that he could not parry with evasive replies, so he determined to come boldly out and tell the truth.

"Young ladies," he said, gravely, "I sighted the brigantine, apparently in chase, just before dawn, and was about to lay to and await her approach, thinking, as you did, that she might bring later dispatches for us; but just then a seaman came aft and said he had a confession to make, if I would promise him full pardon and protection.

"I was impressed by the man's manner and gave him the promise, and he said that he had been approached by a man in Halifax to join in a secret cruise that would pay him handsomely, and that he could get a good bonus down.

"It seems that his parents in England were to be dispossessed of their farm, through a mortgage, as the bank in which they had their money deposited had failed, and failing to get the amount he wished to send them, through another source where he had expected it, he at once determined to join this secret expedition for the bonus, though he would have to desert His Majesty's service to do so.

"He however asked for leave, and pretended to desert, got his money, which was some one hundred and fifty pounds sterling, and enlisted with the secret band, which he discovered was under the leadership of none other than the Black Pirate himself."

"But he is dead," cried both maidens in a breath.

"It seems not, for this sailor saw him face to face, and says he escaped, and was paying liberally for men to cut out the brigantine and follow and capture this schooner."

"Oh Heaven have mercy! Leon St. Vale was on the brigantine, and would never surrender alive," groaned Lady Eve, thinking at that moment more of her lover than of herself.

As for Lena La Rue, she uttered no word, but turned deadly pale.

"The sailor," resumed Captain Cuthbert, "seems to have spoken truly, for he deserted the others, when ordered on board the schooner, and intended to make known the intention of the Black Pirate, but did not believe he could get out of the harbor.

"It seems, however, that the storm and darkness have aided him, and as yonder vessel has a large crew on board, I fear it is as he says, that she has fallen again into the hands of the Philistines," said the old captain sadly.

"And Lieutenant St. Vale's fate?" asked Eve eagerly.

"Alas! I know not what to say; but I shall press on as hard as I can, and do all I can to keep the schooner out of the clutch of that accursed sea monster— Hal! there goes a gun," and as the captain spoke a puff of smoke came from the bows of the brigantine, and a solid shot went flying over the deck of the schooner, showing that she was within easy range of the pursuer, whoever might be her commander.

CHAPTER XXIV.

A RUNNING FIGHT.

As soon as Captain Cuthbert discovered that the schooner was within range of the bow guns of the brigantine he determined to call his crew to quarters.

The little craft had but two guns to a broadside, and a bow and stern pivot eighteen, against a heavy armament of the brigantine.

Also her crew numbered but forty men, and he felt sure, from what the repentant seaman had told him that if the brigantine was really under the Black Pirate, that he had not less than three-score men under his command.

Still he was not going to surrender his vessel while there was a chance of beating the brigantine off, or disabling her by a well-aimed shot.

He had fought the Pirate Chief before and well knew how merciless he was, and that he knew no mercy toward men, and would be equally as merciless against the two maidens under his charge.

"Get to your guns, lads, and we'll see if this fellow can take us as easily as he thinks," called out the captain, and then he urged upon the maidens to retire to the cabin.

But this both of them refused to do, and frankly confessed that they would rather be killed on the deck by a shot, than fall into the power of the Black Pirate.

Under the fearful pressure of the canvas she carried, the brigantine rapidly gained upon the

schooner, although she was a swift sailer, and also crowded with sail from deck to topmast.

But the larger hull of the brigantine enabled her to stand the rough waves and sail-pressure better than the extremely low hull of the schooner, and soon to all it became evident that the chase would not last many hours.

"If he fires again, and at us, I will feel that the Black Pirate is indeed on board and answer him," said Captain Cuthbert, to the young officer who was acting as his lieutenant.

And again came the shot from the brigantine, and this time it cut through the mainsail, leaving a large rent.

"Fire!" cried Captain Cuthbert, and the stern pivot gun of the schooner belched forth its iron messenger.

All watched the effect with anxious eyes, and saw with profound regret that the shot flew wide.

Again and again the piece was discharged, and yet with little result, while each shot from the brigantine told upon the rigging, and now and then upon the hull of the schooner.

"We are too low in the water, and too unsteady for true aim," said Captain Cuthbert, anxiously, and finding that escape was impossible, and that the brigantine was damaging him severely he determined to at once wear round and try conclusions with his foe so as to end the awful suspense.

But the brigantine delivered a broadside as the schooner wore round, that struck with terrible effect, cutting the foremast in two thirty feet above the deck, and killing half a dozen men, and wounding more.

Captain Cuthbert again begged the maidens to retreat to the cabin, in the companionway of which stood Lady Eve's maid imploring her mistress with tears to seek refuge below, but both still firmly refused, and the gallant commander sprung to the duties devolving upon him.

That the schooner was in a lamentable condition was too evident, for, incumbered by the wrecked rigging, she had broached to, and lay in the trough of the sea, so that none of her guns could be brought to bear upon the brigantine, which was now coming on straight for her, and rapidly shortening sail as she came.

Had it not been for the fair passengers, Captain Cuthbert, with the remembrance of his former meeting with the Black Pirate, would undoubtedly have fought to the bitter end; but he hoped that the worst that would befall them would be a detention until a fair ransom was paid, and whatever his fate might be he was ready to meet it like the true man he was.

White as marble, but firm and calm, stood Lady Eve and Lena La Rue, and, with nothing more to do, Captain Cuthbert stood by their side.

At the feet of Eve, sobbing bitterly, was the maid, and the officers and crew stood apart, awaiting their doom with calmness.

To avoid further bloodshed, Captain Cuthbert had hauled down his proud ensign, and all that could be done was to await the result.

Rolling upon the waves, the schooner lay almost a wreck upon the waters, and even her wounded seamen ceased to groan to await the coming of their foes.

Nearer and nearer came the brigantine, looking beautiful, and dangerous withal, as she bounded over the waves, and every eye upon the schooner watched her with eager, anxious look.

Nearer and nearer she came, her men at their guns, and a crowd forward with arms in hand, evidently there to board.

With consummate skill she went about within a cable's length of the schooner, and gently came toward her lee-quarter, when a ringing voice hailed:

"Schooner ahoy!"

"Ay, ay, the brigantine," gruffly responded Captain Cuthbert.

"Do you strike your flag?" came in the same trumpet tones.

"Do you not see that my peak is bare?"

"It is Leon! ah! it is Lieutenant St. Vale," cried out Lady Eve, excitedly, as she recognized the tall form of her lover, who had sprung upon the bulwark forward, and stood above the heads of the boarders.

"Then I have made a fool of myself," growled Captain Cuthbert.

Nearly all on board the schooner now recognized the tall form and handsome face of Leon St. Vale, and felt abashed at having fired upon a king's ship.

But just then the wind shook out the flag at the brigantine's peak, and a cry of horror broke from every lip, for a black flag was revealed, and in its center a blood-red vampire* with extended wings was visible.

At the same instant Leon St. Vale sprung upon the deck of the schooner, the grapnels having been thrown from the brigantine, and he was followed by two-score fierce seamen armed to the teeth.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE OCEAN VAMPIRE.

"LEON ST. VALE! you under that flag? Is this some fearful joke?"

The words came in suppressed tones from Captain Cuthbert, as he saw the young officer before him, his drawn cutlass in hand.

St. Vale was deathlike in his paleness, and his eyes had an unnatural glitter as he bent them upon the old captain, and answered:

"It is no joke, Captain Cuthbert, as you shall see, but stern reality, for I am, as you see, under the flag of the Vampire."

"The Vampire! Great God! how have you fallen!" groaned Captain Cuthbert, and Eve and Lena echoed the groan, while the former sunk upon the deck unconscious.

"Remove those ladies to the cabin, Captain Cuthbert, for they and their valuables are safe, and yourself and crew can remain with the schooner; but the dispatches and the treasure you bear to your king—"

"And your king too, base, ungrateful boy," cried Captain Cuthbert.

"Silence! for I will bear no recrimination, sir, from you.

"I say *your* king, for he is mine no longer, and I take his treasure to prove my words," was the stern reply.

"Would to God I had known who and what you had become, Leon St. Vale, and never would I have lowered my flag to you.

"Ay, that innocent girl lying there, who loved you so dearly, should have sunk in this schooner to the ocean depths, rather than live to know what you, her idol, had become."

"Old man, bridle your tongue, I warn you, or you may drive me to greater crime.

"Remove those ladies to the cabin, I say, and go thou with them."

There was no mistaking the tone of St. Vale, and with a groan, wrung from his inmost heart, for he had dearly loved the young officer, Captain Cuthbert raised the unconscious Eve in his arms and bore her to the cabin, followed by Lena La Rue, weeping as though her very heart would break.

With burning eyes, haggard face, and quivering lips, Leon St. Vale saw them go, for over the bows of the brigantine he beheld a cruel face gazing upon him with gloating joy at his fall and his revenge, and he knew well if he wavered one atom no power could save all on the schooner from the diabolical rage of the Ocean Vampire, for the chief had removed already from his face the black stain upon it and stood his natural self before his crew.

His eyes seemed fierce, relieved against his white skin, and the powder-marks on his forehead and cheeks gave him a more savage expression.

"Now remove the king's treasure, lads.

"You will find it in the hold beneath the cabin floor," ordered St. Vale, and a dozen seamen sprung to obey.

Soon the boxes of gold were transferred to the brigantine, the wallets of dispatches were given up by Captain Cuthbert without a word, and St. Vale called out:

"Now get aboard your vessel, lads."

With alacrity they obeyed, just as Captain Cuthbert again returned on deck and said, addressing St. Vale:

"Lady Eve Alstone has recovered consciousness, and demands of you, through me, her miniature which you wear."

A hoarse laugh was heard in the bows of the brigantine, and St. Vale knew from whose lips it came, and his whole form quivered with suppressed emotion; but he answered as calmly as he could:

"Say to Lady Eve Alstone, Captain Cuthbert, that I will some day return that miniature to her in person.

* The vampire is a bat of large size, reported to cause the death of men and brutes by sucking their blood. In Eastern Europe the vampire is supposed by the superstitious to contain the soul of a wicked person returned to earth to do all kinds of mischief. —THE AUTHOR.

"No; you shall not wear her sacred image next your false, dishonored heart."

"Hold! dare use such words to me, and by the God above, I'll turn these red hounds upon you," shouted St. Vale, in a voice that struck terror to all who heard him, and made even brave old Captain Cuthbert quail.

Without another word, and, as though fearing to trust himself further, St. Vale waved his hand, as though in silent farewell to some one, and sprang back upon the bows of the schooner.

"Cut loose those irons!" he shrieked in trumpet tones.

Instantly the schooner's crew gladly obeyed.

"Let her fall off, helmsman!"

The order was promptly obeyed, and the next instant the brigantine was dashing away from the schooner.

In a stooping position, to keep hidden from those on the schooner, the Ocean Vampire had run aft, as St. Vale sprang on board again, and met him as he came aft, with a look of fiendish delight upon his brutal, cruel face.

"You have done well, my gallant lieutenant, and your nerve has taken from my heart every atom of bitterness and hatred I felt against you, and henceforth I am your friend."

He held forth his hand, but Leon St. Vale did not see it, for there came a mist before his eyes, darkness followed, his form swayed, the deck seemed going from under him, and he fell headlong down the companionway into the cabin, for nature had revolted at last under the fearful strain put upon his nerves.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE RETURN.

AFTER the departure of the brigantine, from alongside of the Dispatch Schooner, all on board gave a sigh of relief.

They had feared for their lives, they had dreaded a visit from the Black Pirates, whose butcheries were known the world over, and they felt their inability to cope with the monster.

Instead, the black flag had been floating above a deck which had been wrested from the pirate by the very one who came in the person of a freebooter, and under the name of one who had spread terror upon the seas years before.

A few hours before they had left the brigantine with the English ensign at her peak, quietly riding at anchor in an armed port, and under the command of a young lieutenant who had rendered his king brave service.

They were prevented by that very vessel, under the Vampire flag, and commanded by the same young officer who proclaimed himself a pirate by the robbery of his king's cruiser.

Captain Cuthbert was astounded at what had occurred, as was also Lena La Rue, while poor Eve seemed dazed with the grief and surprise that had come upon her heart.

Once the schooner was free of her foe, and Captain Cuthbert began repairs upon her, so that he could beat back to port, for to cross the ocean in her crippled condition was impossible.

He soon had the men working well, and late in the afternoon sail was set and the schooner begun to tack back to Halifax, just as a sail bore in sight, coming down with a free breeze toward them.

The brigantine was just then disappearing in the distance, and heading southward, and the new sail was recognized with a cheer of delight as the Vulture.

Soon she came within hailing distance and luffing up a boat put off from her and Sir Roslyn Stannix came on board.

"Well, captain, it seems as though you had been worsted in action," he said, as he was met at the gangway by Captain Cuthbert.

"Far more than you can imagine, Sir Roslyn, for we were boarded by a pirate," sadly returned the old commander.

"A pirate, and you were not able to beat him off?" said Sir Roslyn in surprise.

"No, and you see his work upon us, while half a dozen poor fellows are dead, as many more wounded, not to speak of the loss of my dispatches and treasure."

"By the king, but which way did this fellow sail, captain, for I will give chase, though I came out in search of the brigantine, which mysteriously left port night before last in the storm."

"Find the brigantine, Sir Roslyn Stannix, and you have the pirate."

"Ha! can it be that she was boarded in port and cut out?"

"She was commanded by one who sails under the Vampire flag, Sir Roslyn."

"By heaven! the Ocean Vampire arisen from the sea once more, Cuthbert!"

"Then we must look sharp, for he was as bad as the Black Pirate."

"This one is well known to us, Sir Roslyn, for he is registered in the king's service as Leon St. Vale."

"God have mercy! do you mean what you say Rupert Cuthbert?" and Sir Roslyn seized the arm of the old captain.

"Alas that I do, Stannix, for it has hurt me to the heart to see the noble boy fall so low."

"But it is true; he gave chase, fired upon us, boarded at the head of his crew, cutlass in hand, and robbed the hold of the king's treasure and also took the dispatches."

"How hard is this to believe; but if such be the case, then I shall hunt him down."

"Come, I will tow you back to port, and send to the admiral at once a report of the brigantine's flight and poor St. Vale's sad fall."

Entering the cabin, Sir Roslyn was the further moved by the disgrace of St. Vale, by beholding Lady Eve and Lena La Rue.

The latter grieved for his downfall as a dear friend, while the former tried to tear from her heart the image of one who had proven himself so unworthy of her love, and against whom now grew stronger the belief that he had indeed been guilty of plotting her father's death, as written her in the anonymous letter.

Back to Halifax harbor the reader will remember that the Vulture towed the schooner, and the whole town stood aghast at the awful tidings that spread like wildfire through it.

Work on the Petrel was at once hastened, and Sir Roslyn determined to send her to England with dispatches as soon as he received word from the admiral.

Lord Cecil was selected as the officer to go as first-lieutenant of the Petrel, as Captain Cuthbert, who was to command her on the cruise to England, would not return, and intended leaving active service on account of his wounds.

The result of the news was to bring the admiral in his flagship at once round to Halifax, and, as the Petrel was a sister ship of the Vulture, and the two were the fastest cruisers on the coast, he ordered them to prepare to sail in pursuit of the brigantine, making Lord Cecil the commander of the former, and dispatching the schooner, under Captain Cuthbert, once more on her voyage to England.

The two brigs and the schooner were ready for sea the same day, and just before their sailing a packet ship arrived from New York and reported that the Ocean Vampire was spreading terror along the entire coast below and seemed to feel no dread of the American cruisers sent in pursuit of her daring commander.

"Alas! alas! that he should fall so low," groaned Lady Eve, as she stood on the deck of the schooner, for again was she going to try her destiny on the little craft, and alone, for news from New York had caused Lena La Rue to bid her friend farewell and sail for that city.

At a signal from the flag-ship the schooner, Petrel and Vulture raised their anchors, spread their sails and sped down the harbor, where, after sailing a few leagues in company they separated, the little messenger-craft to head for the shores of Old England, and the brigs to shape their course southward, to hunt down the Water Vampire.

CHAPTER XXVII.

AN UNEXPECTED ALLY.

THE deep swoon into which Leon St. Vale fell, when nature gave way under the strain upon it, lasted for some time.

The cruel chief saw him pitch headlong down the companionway, and yet moved not to his aid, or even cared whether he had hurt himself, or was dead.

But there was one who had caught him as he fell, and bearing him to a divan had placed him upon it, where he lay as though life had forever left his body.

That one was Congo the deformed African, whom a brute to many yet had formed a great admiration for the man who had proven his master, and also the victor over the Ocean Vampire himself.

As tender as a woman in his touch, he had chafed the hands of the young officer, while he had forced between his teeth a spoonful of brandy.

The effect was soon visible, for St. Vale began to rally, and soon came out of the deep swoon that had come upon him.

At first he seemed bewildered, when he opened his eyes; but seeing the African, he shuddered, and rose to a sitting position, while he said in a tone of inquiry:

"It all grew dark before me, and I believe I fell?"

"Yes, the master fell, and Congo has restored him," humbly said the slave.

"It had been better had I never recovered to know what I am believed to be by those I respect," bitterly said St. Vale.

"No, the earth is large, the people are many, and the master may live to be rich and happy," was the comforting response of Congo.

The tone, kind and sympathetic, drew the attention of St. Vale more particularly upon the African, and he said:

"Ah, Congo, you know not what I have done; but of that I will not speak, for I have linked my fate with that of the Vampire at least for the present, and must bide my destiny, come what may."

"I thank you, Congo, for being my friend, and I shall not forget your kindness."

He grasped the claw-like hand of the negro as he spoke, rose to his feet, shook himself, as a lion might in anger, and walked on deck.

"You have recovered, I see," coldly said the Vampire, who was smoking a cigar, as he paced the deck from port to starboard.

Without noticing his remark, St. Vale said coldly:

"I have come to report for duty, sir."

"Good! take the deck, and head for the mouth of the Kennebec, for we may pick up something of value about there," and the chief left the deck in as matter-of-fact way as though St. Vale had been his lieutenant for months.

Having dropped Cape Sable off the port quarter, St. Vale told the helmsman how to steer, and paced to and fro with monotonous tread, excusing himself from going to supper when summoned by Congo.

The sun sunk from sight, the stars peeped out one by one, and the night cast its somber wing over the sea, and the shadows deepened in the heart of the wretched man.

Leaning over the taffrail in deep thought, he started when eight bells struck, and declined to be relieved by the chief, telling him he could not sleep, and would hold the deck until midnight.

The Vampire bowed, smiled, glanced over the vessel, and at her rate of sailing, and returned to the cabin, where St. Vale soon after heard the clink of gold, as the pirate was counting the treasure which he had robbed the schooner of.

The wind was blowing five knots, but the swift brigantine was making six out of it under easy sail, and the ripple of the waters about her bows alone broke the stillness of the night.

The man at the wheel held her squarely on her course, and the men forward were as still as ghosts, no sounds of laughter and song coming from the fore-castle.

In the waist Robert Brent, who had been made boatswain by the chief, was standing, and casting an occasional glance at St. Vale, whom he did not seem to like having been made second in command of the brigantine, as, if a stray shot removed the chief, he would then be captain, and might wreak upon him full revenge for his having betrayed to the Vampire who it was that had killed Sir Grey Alstone.

"Go aft and report to Lieutenant St. Vale that a light is visible three points off the starboard bow," said Brent, addressing one of the watch who was near.

The man came aft, and politely saluting, made the report, and stepped to the starboard side to show the light to the officer, while he whispered, as soon as away from the helmsman:

"I see you have not penetrated my disguise."

"Ha—"

"Sh—" and the seaman placed his fingers upon his lips, for St. Vale had spoken aloud, and with ready presence of mind St. Vale continued:

"Ah! I see it now; doubtless a fishing smack, though I will soon find out."

"Helmsman, bring her up a couple of points nearer, and hold her so."

"Ay, ay, sir," and the bows of the brigantine came nearer the wind, while St. Vale whispered:

"I knew your voice, though your disguise I could not penetrate; you are Frank."

"Yes; and I tried hard to get you word of the chief's coming on board; but I could not, so had to come with them."

"Now I shall go forward, but remember you have an ally on board, and the Vampire has his life-long foe again on his trail."

As he spoke the youth glided forward and resumed his place near Robert Brent in the waist, his short false beard and well-fitting wig thoroughly disguising him even to the most searching eyes.

CHAPTER XXVIII. A YANKEE'S RUSE.

THE light, which the keen eye of Robert Brent had discerned off the starboard bow, was soon found to be at the masthead of a vessel; but as the brigantine carried no lights visible, and was sailing quietly along, it was evident that she had not been sighted by the look-out on the stranger.

Walking into the waist, St. Vale touched Brent on the shoulder, as he leaned over the bulwark.

The man started, instinctively seemed to drop his hand upon his knife, as though from force of habit, and turning quickly, confronted the lieutenant.

He saluted politely, and yet seemed to be embarrassed.

"What do you make her out, Brent?" calmly asked St. Vale.

The man gave a sigh of relief, for he believed the time had come for him to answer for his treachery, and he expected little aid from the cruel chief.

"I think she is a trader, sir; perhaps a packet out of some of the coast towns," he answered politely.

"So I think, and yet we must be wary, as we are likely to run across American cruisers in these waters."

"So we are, sir, and I will take the night-glass and go to the foretop and give her a good square look."

"Do so, Brent."

The man obeyed, seemingly glad to escape from beneath the searching eye turned upon him.

In a short time he returned hastily and said:

"It is a large ship, sir, and evidently a richly freighted American."

"She still keeps her course, as though she had not sighted us."

"So it seems, sir; shall I call the chief?" and it was very apparent that Robert Brent liked not being alone with St. Vale.

"No, I am on duty now, and if I need advice, I will not seek it from you as to when the chief shall be called," was the haughty reply.

"Pardon me, sir, and let me ask you now, sir, to forgive my seeming treachery towards you, but—"

"Robert Brent, I have nothing to forgive you, and let me here say that you need have no fear of me, for I would risk my life to protect yours, rather than harm you."

"I want you to live, my man, for I have work for you to do in the future."

"I will do all in my power to serve you, sir," humbly said Brent.

"I am convinced that you will when I call on you."

"Now let the past drop between us, and I will urge the Vampire to make you second officer of the brigantine."

"I thank you, sir, for you have a noble heart to forgive me."

"My dear Brent, you do not half know me," and St. Vale again walked aft, and then ordered the men quietly to the guns, for the strange vessel was now not more than a mile distant.

When he returned to the quarter-deck, St. Vale took a closer look at the stranger through his glass, and fairly started at the discovery he made.

Should he at once inform the chief, or should he go on into the trap.

Such were the thoughts that flashed through his mind.

That there was a trap his quick eyes told him, though perhaps not another eye on board the brigantine could have discovered it.

The vessel was there, a large merchant barque, and she was sailing with the wind upon her starboard beam, and at an angle that would bring her across the brigantine's stern about a league ahead, if both maintained the same course they were then on, and the same rate of speed.

The stranger was sailing slowly, though there was considerable sail up.

This St. Vale had just discovered, and then he looked for the cause, and found it.

Upon the windward side of the barque was another vessel.

It's sails were not set, and its masts were in a line with those of the barque, though they were visible upon close scrutiny from their greater rake.

The distance that they were apart, compared with the size of the barque, showed St. Vale that it was a large vessel, and a cruiser, without doubt.

The brigantine had been evidently first seen by those on the other vessels, and her peculiar rig perhaps recognized, and the cruiser had used the merchant vessel as a foil to get nearer to her.

It was just such tricks that had won the Yankees a name for shrewdness, during the war just past with England, and there was little doubt but that the two vessels were American.

To hold on as he would bring the brigantine in close quarters, with the cruiser within half an hour, and the latter was without doubt far her superior in guns and men.

It was a good chance for St. Vale to get the brigantine caught; but would the Americans, or even his own people believe that he had acted a part after he had captured the dispatch schooner?

No, he would gain the confidence of his cruel chief by at once saving the brigantine.

With this intention he passed the word quietly forward for the men to spring to their posts, the halyards were let fly, the helm was put hard up, and away the brigantine darted before the wind, her crew spreading sail upon her as she flew along.

At first an angry growl went up from the men, for there in plain sight was a large merchantman, evidently richly freighted, and Robert Brent darted into the companionway of the ward-room, to make his way to the cabin and inform his chief that St. Vale was proving a traitor.

Instantly the Vampire rushed upon deck, aroused from sudden sleep, and shouted out:

"Ho! what is your game, man, that you lose me a prize?"

"On the contrary, I save you the brigantine and your neck," was the cool reply of St. Vale.

"In the devil's name how, when you run from a merchant ship?"

"Wait and watch yonder merchant craft."

The chief turned his blazing eyes upon the barque, and as he looked he suddenly saw her fall off before the wind, and away from her side swung a long, rakish cruiser, a brig-of-war far larger than the pirate craft.

And from her yards and masts fell snowy canvas, while her rigging was full of men, and loud voices were heard in quick command.

"By the sins of Satan! St. Vale, you have more than redeemed yourself in my eyes, and I humbly beg your pardon for my unjust suspicions."

"You have the eye of a gull or you could never have detected that ruse, and the fellow would have had us strung up before breakfast."

"Lively, hounds, or you'll yet have your necks stretched."

The chief's words were heard by all, and ashamed of their suspicions of St. Vale, the crew went to work with a will.

And there was need of it, for once free of the barque, which he had used as a foil, the American cruiser, as her build and hull showed her to be, proved to be in deadly earnest, for she came on at a slapping pace, and the glimmer of her battle-lanterns showed that she was going to make it a hot chase for the pirate.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE VAMPIRE AT WORK.

WHEN the brigantine sped away from the cruiser, it was evident that the Vampire felt the full danger of his position.

He had a crew that had never been really tested, and but one officer besides himself, while his force amounted to a few less than fifty, and

the American doubtless carried three times that many.

To St. Vale he left the entire management of the vessel, and was pleased with the skillful manner in which he controlled the crew and lost no opportunity of adding to the speed of the brigantine by any device known to old seamen.

Finding that the brigantine was beginning to drop the cruiser, the captain of the latter vessel opened fire from his heavy bow gun, and the very first shots proved conclusively that a little practice would enable them to cripple the pirate seriously.

"Clear this stern pivot for action," cried St. Vale, and the order being promptly obeyed, he turned and sighted the gun himself and applied the fuse.

In that gun was the strong hope of the chief to aid his escape, as the one of the same caliber mounted upon the fore-castle his dependence in overhauling a chase, and eagerly he watched the result of the shot.

A cry of profane delight broke from his lips as he saw the iron messenger tear through the rigging of the cruiser.

At the same moment a shot came hurtling above the heads of the pirates, cut its way through the bulwarks forward, after laying two men dead upon the deck, and plunged into the sea.

Again all watched the effect of St. Vale's second shot, and a cheer broke from the pirates as they heard the crash as the ball struck, heard loud orders, and then beheld the fore-mast topple over.

"Saved! well done, my noble lieutenant! your dark eyes are true as steel," shouted the delighted Vampire.

Broaching to, the cruiser gave the brigantine a parting broadside of rage, and the pirate vessel sped on no longer in danger.

"Now, St. Vale, I will take the deck, while you seek rest," said the Vampire, in a kindly tone.

"If I might make a suggestion, sir, I would say that Robert Brent would make a good lieutenant."

"He is a thorough seaman, far above the common herd, favored in birth and education, and we need an officer for each watch," said St. Vale.

"You are right; here Brent, come aft."

The man silently obeyed, and the Vampire continued:

"Lieutenant St. Vale has suggested that you be made second officer, and I follow his suggestion."

"Tell Hoodly to take your place as boat-swain, and you go on duty as an officer at eight bells."

"Thank you, sir, and I thank you too Lieutenant St. Vale," said Brent, quietly, and he walked aft, while he muttered to himself:

"I do not understand Leon St. Vale, and I know less of him the more I study him."

"Here he is, after my treachery to him in betraying his secret to the chief, befriending me."

"I must look out, for kindness sometimes kills, I have heard."

When the sun arose the crippled cruiser was barely visible, and near her was the barque, which she had so nearly used as a successful foil.

Being now not many leagues off Portland, Maine, the Ocean Vampire concluded to run close in to the coast and begin his depredations against the merchant vessels and packets that were running out of that port to England, the Indies, and the Atlantic towns of the United States, for even at that early date Portland was an important shipping center.

Shortly after dark the light-house came in view, and an hour after a large clipper ship had been captured and her crew ruthlessly put to death, the vessel robbed and scuttled.

"I've a mind to leave my mark in a new way, St. Vale," said the cruel chief, approaching his lieutenant, who had not been on duty during the capture of the ship, and had taken no part in the red work.

"I think you do leave your mark most thoroughly now," was St. Vale's reply, with a bitter smile.

"But I will try a new plan."

"And may I ask what that is?"

"You remember how I treated the Petrel, sent by the king of England especially to hunt me down?"

"I remember it well, sir."

"Well, as I intend to be the Vampire, my

old character, and the Black Pirate combined, I must be worthy of the combination, so I shall hang the crew of all the vessels I capture, and set the crafts adrift to be seen by others, and thus spread the news that the Vampire is at work."

St. Vale shuddered at the proposition, yet said with no sign of emotion:

"You certainly will gain a name by it."

"I will add to the two names I have already made famous."

And most truly did the Water Vampire revive his old reputation as a monster, when he sailed under that name, while he kept up the cruel reputation of the part he had played as the Black Pirate, until the fleets of the world seemed to have but one desire and that was the capture of the sea-terror.

Merchant vessels, every small armed vessel, unprotected coast-hamlets, lordly homes upon the sea-shore, all became the objects of his attention, and numerous ships cruising about listlessly, their crews hanging in the rigging, attested the inhuman work of the monster in human form so appropriately calling himself the Vampire.

In vain was it that the Petrel and Vulture, with numerous other vessels of war, cruised in pursuit of them, for he avoided them if his superior in strength, fought them, if the humor suited him, and eluded all attempt at capture, while his depredations were daily and nightly kept up.

To those who had remembered who had been in command of the brigantine the night of her flight from Halifax harbor, and who had chased, captured, and robbed the Dispatch Schooner, it was believed that Leon St. Vale was the Ocean Vampire, having become a monster of cruelty, for it had gone abroad that the old Sea Vampire was dead years before.

And these tidings drifted across the waters, and reached the ears of Lady Eve in Castle Curse, where she dwelt in solitude, and it almost broke her heart, for still she loved the man to whom her heart had gone forth in all its worship in her girlhood.

CHAPTER XXX. CATCHING A TARTAR.

HALF a year had gone by since the brigantine so boldly ran out of Halifax harbor and began her cruel piracies upon the high seas.

And in that time, from Newfoundland to Mexico, in the West Indies, and across to the English, French and Spanish coasts, had the name of the Ocean Vampire spread, and everywhere did it cause a thrill of horror and dread.

English, American, French and Spanish cruisers were on the watch constantly for the hated pirate; but, though they captured innumerable smaller buccaneer crafts, and almost drove the freebooters from the Atlantic, the Vampire still remained uncaught, and still kept up his fearful deeds of crime.

In the months that had passed the Vampire had greatly increased the strength of his crew, for he had visited his island rendezvous in the West Indies, and there found men of a like caliber as himself, ready to join their fate with his.

The brigantine was ever kept rigged with the greatest care, and her armament had been added to by placing two pivot heavy guns upon the stern to keep at bay a heavy foe in a chase, and also a long thirty-two had been mounted on a pivot amidship, which gave her a broadside of a vessel twice her size.

Learning of the intended sailing of a richly-freighted ship from Baltimore, the Vampire at once determined to capture her.

The papers which he had captured from another vessel gave the date of her sailing and a list of her cargo, and to make her his prize the Vampire boldly ran into the Chesapeake and dropped anchor in the shelter of a small island that would give him a view of the bay and all passing down it.

Several vessels passed, but the longed-for craft did not appear, and the pirate chief feared that in some way she had escaped him, when suddenly she hove in sight, running close inshore.

She was a large brig, and her rig and size coincided with the description of the one he looked for.

When she had passed on down the bay he raised anchor and followed.

It was night when he overhauled her off the mouth of the Potomac, and the brigantine headed as though she were going by.

A much faster sailer than the brig, she be-

gan to overhaul her rapidly, bearing close in, so as to board her quickly at the proper time.

Apparently suspecting no harm from a cruiser that seemed to have come out of Baltimore harbor, the crew on the brig could be seen leisurely surveying the handsome brigantine, and watching with admiration her trim rig, gaunt hull and rapid sailing under the five-knot breeze that was blowing.

Nearer and nearer drew the brigantine to the merchant craft, until at last her needle-like bowsprit was on a line with her stern.

Then her sharp bows crept up, and ere long the two vessels were broadside to broadside, and not a length apart, the pirate being to windward, and his tall masts slightly taking the breeze out of the merchantman's sails.

"Ho, the brig!" suddenly called out Leon St. Vale, who held the deck.

"Ahoy, the cruiser!" came the answer.

"What brig is that?"

"The Mercedes, from Baltimore to Madrid," was the reply.

"It is our vessel, then; lay her aboard, Lieutenant St. Vale," cried the Vampire, who was seated in a chair on deck, and as he spoke, he arose and kicked the chair down the cabin companionway.

The men were already prepared for boarding, for they lay about the deck in groups, armed to the teeth, and only waiting the order of their chief.

As he expected slight resistance from the dozen men on the brig, the Vampire ordered St. Vale to lay the brigantine alongside, while he boarded with but one-half his crew.

St. Vale himself took the helm, and, as the brigantine forged ahead half a length, he suddenly and skillfully let her fall off, and laid her alongside of the brig.

Instantly the grapnels were thrown, and two-score pirates followed their giant leader upon the deck of the brig.

But suddenly a stern voice shouted:

"Fire! up lads and at them!"

A volley of musketry followed this order, and a hundred men suddenly sprung from out of the very decks of the brig, it seemed, and furiously attacked the pirates.

Caught in a trap, the Vampire at once shouted:

"Ho! St. Vale to the rescue! to the rescue, Vampires!"

Instantly over the bulwarks came St. Vale and the remainder of the pirate crew, and hot and fierce raged the fight.

Enraged at the trick that had been played upon him by the crew of the supposed merchant brig, the Vampire, conscious in his own strength, determined to visit a fearful punishment upon his foes, and ordered them cut down upon all sides.

Like very demons the pirates fought, and yet they were met with the same demon-like courage by the defenders of the brig, and seeing that he was losing many men, and had nothing but hard knocks to gain by a continued fight upon deck, the Vampire cried:

"One more rush upon them, hounds, and then to your own deck."

The rush was made, and in that rush a tall form staggered and fell.

"Great God! they have killed St. Vale! Avenge him, Vampires!"

The chief fairly yelled the words, and for an instant the pirates drove all before them; but then a shot struck the chief himself, wounding his strong right arm, and instantly he ordered a retreat. The men clambered back to the brigantine, the irons were cast loose, and the vessels swung apart.

"Pour your broadside upon them! Let them have the Vampires' mark!" cried the chief, and the guns of the brigantine sent shot after shot into the brig.

But not wishing to be caught in the Chesapeake, and knowing that cruisers near would come at the firing, the Vampire at once spread all sail for the open Atlantic, leaving the brig a seeming wreck upon the waters, and Leon St. Vale and a score of his crew lying prone upon her deck.

CHAPTER XXXI. AN UNSUCCESSFUL RUSE.

AWAY sped the brigantine in the darkness, still firing viciously from her stern guns at the brig, as long as she was in range, and with a precision that sent a man or two down at every shot.

But, hardly had she gotten two cable lengths away when a man arose from among

the dead and wounded that incumbered the deck.

Just as he stood upright a slenderly formed seaman sprung toward him, crying eagerly:

"Thank God you live! I feared that you were dead."

"No, I am unhurt, and my falling was a ruse to remain upon the brig."

"We have failed after all it seems," was the reply.

"Yes, though I did my best for his capture."

"True, but our crew has been greatly increased since you left; but come, set your officers to work in looking to the damage done the brig, and run for the nearest inlet on the starboard shore."

"You will not return to Baltimore then, for the brig is not seriously hurt?"

"No; I have another plan in view."

"Then take command and do as you think best."

The man who had arisen from among the heaps of dead and dying now glanced at the rapidly receding brigantine, which had just fired its last shot at the brig, and then gave orders, in a tone that showed he was no novice, to clear the decks of the bodies, and the wounded seamen, and then set sail on the vessel.

The two-score men able for work at once sprung to obey the command without hesitation, and one of their number, a pilot of the Chesapeake, took the helm and the vessel moved off before the wind toward the eastern shore of Maryland.

A few hours' run and the anchor was let fall in a secluded inlet, and then the one who had assumed the leadership entered the cabin, accompanied by the seaman who had so readily yielded control to him.

The cabin was illumined by a swinging lamp, and by no means uncomfortable, and the two men threw themselves into easy-chairs and faced each other, while one deliberately removed from his face a beard and from his head a wig.

Then, as the light fell full upon them the handsome face, grown sad and stern, of Leon St. Vale was revealed in the one, and in the other the pale, boyish countenance of Frank, the sailor lad.

For an instant they regarded each other in silence, and then the youth said:

"Will you hear my report now, sir?"

"Yes, Frank."

"Well, sir, as you directed, I hid myself on board the clipper-ship, which the Vampire set adrift after hanging her crew and robbing her, and—"

"And you were supposed to have been one who fell between the two vessels when we boarded her, and I myself feared you might have been," remarked St. Vale.

"No, sir; I avoided the fight by at once hiding, and I did not come out of my retreat until hours after."

"It was night when I did so, and the sickening sight, of the deck full of the dead crew, nearly caused me to faint; but I rallied and looked about to see what was to be done."

"Of course, unaided I could do nothing to manage the craft, and, with what sail it had set, it drifted about for several days, I eating nothing, although there was plenty to be had."

"But I had no appetite, and was sleepless too, and verily believe I would have gone mad had not an American cruiser sighted the ship on the third day and stood down to her."

"I told the officer who boarded that I was a cabin-boy on board the clipper, and had escaped only by hiding, and he believed me, and I was allowed to remain, while a prize-crew was put on board, to run her into Baltimore."

"Once on shore, I set about to obey your orders, and readily raised money on the jewels you gave me, though I purchased a full suit of female attire to do so, that I might not attract attention, and drove to the loan office in a carriage."

"You were very discreet, Frank," said St. Vale.

"Thank you, sir. Once I had my money I set about looking for a suitable craft for my purpose, and, having found it, readily shipped a crew for a voyage to trade along the South American coast."

"Having learned that the Vampire was cruising between Cape Fear and Montauk Point, I sent letters out by the various packet-ships, addressed to a fictitious firm in Madrid, stating that the Mercedes, richly freighted, would leave Baltimore for Madrid on such a

date, as you bade me do, and it seems the Vampire captured some vessel bearing such letter."

"Yes, and caught at the bait eagerly, Frank, and I did all in my power to convince him that the ship was worth millions, and he headed for the Chesapeake," said St. Vale.

"Among the crew," resumed the youth, "I found men whom I could rely on as officers, and I appointed them, told them that I was bound on a secret cruise, wholly honorable, that the result would pay them largely, and told them to ship a good lot of men."

"This they did, and when the arms were brought on board we set sail, clearing ostensibly for Nassau and a South American trading voyage."

"You know the result, sir, and I am sorry that my ninety men were not sufficient to overwhelm the Vampire's crew."

"He had added half a hundred men to his crew during the three months you were away, Frank; but had this not been the case you would have been successful, taking the pirates wholly by surprise as you did."

"But, as it is, I am content, for I have you safe with me once more; we have a good craft to take us to the Vampire's rendezvous, and I think we can yet come out victors," and St. Vale's face showed that he had but one aim in life before him, if one may judge from its determination and the resolve that shone in his flashing eyes, which was to yet place the noose around the neck of the Ocean Vampire.

CHAPTER XXXII.

A LUCKY DISCOVERY.

WHEN Lena La Rue gave up her idea of crossing the ocean with Eve Alstone, after their capture by the Vampire's vessel, she was in hopes of reaching her home in safety.

To return to it, after so long an absence was sad indeed, for she had left it with her dearly loved mother, whose grave was in the Pirate Island, and numerous dangers and incidents of a most painful nature had stamped themselves indelibly upon her heart, since she had last seen her grand old mansion in the outskirts of New York City, and upon the banks of the majestic Hudson.

Little had she dreamed, when as a girl, she had gazed upon the blue waters, and heard weird stories from her old nurse, of pirates having had their haunts in the vicinity of her home, that she would ever be their captive.

But one little knows what is in store for us, and fortunate is it for us all, that we cannot penetrate the future, and see just when and how our lives will end, and gaze upon the pathways our feet are to traverse toward the grave.

The two events that had left themselves more indelibly stamped upon Lena's heart, were the death of her mother, and her love for Leon St. Vale.

This passion for the gallant young sailor she was soon forced to put a check upon, as she discovered that he not only did not love her, but could not be won, as he was already devoted to another.

That other, Lady Eve Alstone, Lena had learned to love as she would a sister, and seeing that she returned the affection of St. Vale, the lovely New York heiress buried her love in her heart, and hid from the world's gaze the sorrow that she was forced to bear.

But ere long she was drawn toward Lord Cecil Milnor with more than ordinary friendship, and more and more won by his noble nature and fascinating manner, she soon began to feel that all hope of perfect happiness had not died within her heart, and bright dreams of love, if not the first love of her life she had felt for St. Vale, one equally as true, held her in bonds which death alone could break.

As the trim packet upon which she had taken passage from Halifax to New York, was gliding swiftly along over the waters, the third night after leaving port, Lena La Rue stood upon deck, thinking over her past, and future, as I have endeavored to bring them before the reader, and her thoughts were broken now and then by her outspoken admiration of the beauty of the evening, as some one came near her.

The waters glittered like silver under the rays of the rising moon, and there was just breeze enough to send the vessel swiftly along, without any lurching and plunging with rude waves.

"Well, Miss La Rue, are you looking for the man in the moon?" asked Captain Hebron, the

jolly commander of the packet, as he walked aft and joined her.

"No, captain, I was struck with surprise at the peculiar phenomenon of seeing lines across the face of the moon."

"Lines, Miss La Rue?"

"Yes, it seemed, as I was gazing, that a network was spread over its surface—there! now I see it again."

"Ho, helmsman! hard down your helm! ready about!"

Such was the startling cry of the captain, at the last words of Lena, and the watch on deck sprang nimbly to their posts, the vessel answered her helm, and sweeping around, darted away with the wind astern, to the great surprise of the maiden, who, with natural curiosity, asked:

"Is there any danger, Captain Hebron, when the moon is so lined?"

"There is, indeed, Miss La Rue, for that lining was the rigging of a vessel lying right in our course, and evidently waiting for our coming."

"Then it may be a suspicious craft, captain?"

"All vessels with such a rakish rig as that one, Miss La Rue, are suspicious in these waters, and I have been warned to keep an eye on a West Indian pi—I mean craft, that is in this latitude for no good; but it may be one of those trim American cruisers, and doubtless is," he added, as he saw that Lena was affected by his words.

"I can see the vessel now, sir, and she is spreading sail, as though to give chase," said Lena.

"Well, he is welcome, and if he catches the Flying Scud, he is a fast one, Miss La Rue."

"Then your vessel is very fast, sir?"

"The fastest craft afloat, Miss La Rue."

"Excepting yonder craft, captain."

"Why, Miss La Rue, what makes you disparage the Flying Scud?" and the old captain seemed hurt.

"I do not, sir, I only give the other vessel, whatever it may be, due credit, for she is gaining rapidly."

The captain gave a long and earnest glance astern at the stranger, and then cried:

"Egad, you are right, miss."

Then his voice rung out loud and clear in calling all hands ahoy to crowd the ship with canvas, for it was evident now that the vessel in her wake was not only a suspicious looking craft, but a remarkably fast sailer.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

A HOT CHASE.

A NUMBER of the passengers on board the packet had retired for the night, but as soon as it became noised around that the vessel was flying from a strange craft, and one that had the look of a pirate, they arose, and the decks were soon crowded with anxious faces, and nervously all watched the pursuer coming along so swiftly in their wake.

All hands had been called on deck, and, as the stranger was not half a league away, Captain Hebron had set everything below and aloft that would catch a hatful of wind, and the packet was driving along at a speed that, under other circumstances, would have won universal admiration.

But now, with a schooner in her wake, with no topsails set, and wing-and-wing steadily gaining, it seemed as though the ship was not making her best time.

"While I can, Mr. Herbert, we'll throw the wind on the Scud's quarter, and see if that nimble rascal can hold his own with us," said Captain Hebron.

Instantly the orders were given to change the course and haul the sheets aft, and bending well over, as she caught the wind upon her starboard, the Flying Scud went along at a livelier pace than before, carrying a huge white bone in her teeth.

That this was the best point of sailing for the packet was evident, and all anxiously watched to see what their pursuer would do.

Suddenly he too changed his course, but he headed so as to cut the packet off, if he could do so, and each movement brought the two vessels nearer together for awhile, as the change necessarily would do.

But, as the schooner did not seem to gain as rapidly as before, all on board the ship seemed to gain hope, and Captain Hebron said, gleefully:

"Now the Scud is at her best, and see, we are dropping him."

"He has not set his topsails yet, captain," quietly remarked Lena La Rue, who had observed that the schooner had not increased her canvas.

"True, Miss La Rue, but that will not help him enough to catch the Scud," answered the confident captain, and all seemed now hopeful that the schooner had more than her match in the packet.

With the captain's glass to her eye Lena La Rue stood gazing long and earnestly at the pursuing vessel, and said:

"Captain, will you see if he does not carry a very short main and foresail to the length of his masts, or he must spread enormous topsails."

"Miss La Rue, you have a sailor's eye and lingo."

"The glass, please," and the captain turned it upon the schooner.

"Miss La Rue, you have decided well, for the rascal has both mainsail and foresail reefed, and has gained on us with them thus," and Captain Hebron spoke in a low tone, which Lena alone heard, and then walked forward to consult with his officers.

The result of this consultation was that the thirty men who comprised the crew of the packet quietly went to the guns, and pikes, cutlasses, muskets and pistols were brought on deck.

Coming aft again, the captain in his blunt way said, addressing the passengers:

"Friends, I am no man to mince matters, and I tell you frankly that, fast as the Flying Scud is, yonder craft is faster, for he holds his own with a single reef in his sails and no canvas set aloft, so that he is merely playing with us."

"He may be a pirate, and he may be an honest cruiser; but we'll prepare for the worst, and I want help."

"I've got, all told, with the cook and cabin-boys, just thirty-nine in crew to fight him with, but I see here a dozen men whom I expect to lend me a hand, and those who wish to will find weapons forward."

"Those who do not are cowards, and I will send them below with the women and children."

After this there was no man, even with a chicken heart, that dared refuse his aid, and the result was that Captain Hebron mustered under him for duty just half a hundred men.

"I am a good shot, captain, and can handle a sword also, and I gladly volunteer," said Lena, quietly.

"Bless your soul, Miss La Rue, I honor your pluck, and have little doubt but that you could set us all an example; but I'll not risk your pretty face and form to danger, so make you commander of the petticoat brigade below decks, and you are to keep them from running on deck, if it comes to the worst."

All being now in readiness to greet a foe, should the pursuer prove such, every one stood in silence gazing upon the schooner.

The wind was now steadily increasing, and under its pressure the Flying Scud began to forge ahead of its pursuer, until suddenly the creaking of blocks was heard, and the sails of the schooner increased in size.

Under this added sail, the reefs having been shaken out fore and aft, the schooner again held its own for awhile; but the steady increase of the breeze caused her to be again slowly dropped by the packet, and hope arose once more in the hearts of the pursued.

"If this wind blows half a gale and gets a good sea on, I have no fear, for our larger hull will drive along much better than his small one," said Captain Hebron.

"He has not set his topsails or flying-jib, captain," said Lena La Rue, quietly.

"True, miss, and we are leaving him as he is now, and they can but hold him even, with this increasing wind."

"Ah! there go his topsails now—ay, and his jib too."

"Now, we'll see what speed there is in him."

The schooner now looked like a flying cloud of pure white floating along over the crested waves, and was indeed a beautiful sight, yet a fearful one to those who know not the danger to them, hidden beneath that snowy canvas.

"By Neptune! but he gains on us, and the Scud can be pressed ahead little more."

"Set every inch of duck, Mr. Herbert that will draw, and I'll take the helm myself to see that she does not swerve an inch," said the captain.

"Oh, for a gale!" he cried, a few moments after, as Lena, who stood near the wheel, gazing through the glass, said in her calm way:

"The Flying Scud has met her match, Captain Hebron."

All could now see that the ship was doing her best, and still the schooner was gaining steadily.

"We'll fight him to the bitter end, for this is too fair a fight to give up without a savage struggle, Herbert," said the gallant old captain to his first officer, and he glanced significantly over his fair passengers, until his eyes rested upon Lena.

"Captain Hebron, that vessel I recognize, sir, having seen her often in the Southern waters," said the second mate, coming aft.

"Well, Rodley, what do you make of her?"

"A devilish pirate, sir, and one of the fleet of the Buccaneer's League."

"The devil!"

"Yes, sir, she is a devil, and no craft afloat can sail with her, while her captain is as cunning as a fox and fierce as a wolf."

"He has been nearly caught several times by running afoul of a man-of-war he took to be a merchantman, and he is now playing with us until daylight, when he can see just what we are."

"And you are convinced, Rodley, that he is the one you think?"

"I know it, sir, for I recognize fully the cut of his rig and hull, for I have been watching him through my glass an hour or more."

"I half-feared it was the Ocean Vampire, whom you know is again afloat."

"No, captain; I know his craft, too, having cruised long in the waters of the Indies; but this is one of the Vampire's fleet, and the best one, and her commander is Captain Juan Morena, and her name is the Consuelo, or I'll give a year's pay to charity."

"Well, we will fight her, be she what she may."

"Certainly, sir, and may luck roost on our topmast; but she carries heavy guns and a large crew."

"Luck may help us, and pray Heaven it be on our side. Now warn the crew that they will be strung up if they do not whip that red pirate, and if we do beat him off, they shall all have a year's pay."

"They'll do their best, sir, and may we win," and the mate went forward to tell the crew the captain's promise, should they beat the pirate off.

"Captain Hebron, if you think it will aid, let me promise also to your crew the amount of two years' pay to each one, for I can easily afford it, and a ransom from the hands of pirates would cost me far more," said Lena, who had heard all that passed between the captain and mate.

"Miss La Rue, you are a noble girl, and you shall make the offer yourself."

"Here, Herbert, take the wheel while I go forward with Miss La Rue."

Lena walked forward on the arm of the captain to where the men stood in the waist, ready to spring to their guns at a moment's notice, and Captain Hebron said:

"Lads, yonder fellow, Mr. Rodley says, is a pirate, and I say if you beat her off I'll give to each one of you the amount of a year's pay upon our arrival in port, and to the widows and children of those who may be killed the sum that would go to them."

"Now Miss La Rue has a promise to make also."

A cheer burst from the crew, and when silence was restored Lena said, in a voice that reached every ear:

"Were we taken, it would cost me a large sum to buy myself off from the pirates, and I therefore prefer to pay it to you, who are deserving, and pledge myself to give to you, should you beat off yonder vessel, the amount of two years' pay to each man."

A wild yell broke from the delighted men at this, and cheer after cheer followed for the generous maiden; but suddenly there came a red glare from the schooner's bow, and a shrieking shot rushed over the ship, causing a silence like death to fall upon all in the vessel.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

IN THE TOILS.

THE shot, though expected by all, seemed to be a general surprise, and it had the effect,

after an instant of silence, of sending most of the passengers below in a hurry.

Several men, even, who had volunteered as defenders of the vessel, hurried below with the women and children, with the excuse that they wished to see them in perfect safety.

At their haste both the captain and Lena laughed, and the former said:

"Miss La Rue, you must not desert your command, but go too, and oblige me by sending those deserters back to their posts."

"But there is no danger yet," urged Lena, who cared not yet to leave the deck.

"There is danger, for that fellow heard the lads cheer, and fired to show that he had the power to check it."

"Go below, please, Miss La Rue, and make those men come on deck."

Thus urged, Lena went into the cabin, and found there a scene of wild confusion, which she would rather have avoided, preferring even the dangers on the deck.

Women were wailing, children crying, and three or four men now that they were safe under the deck were trying to soothe them.

"Well, Miss La Rue, I am glad that you have come to help us quiet these poor people, for we dare not leave them in their present unhappy state," said one of the valiant deserters of the deck, and a pompous, bald-headed individual, whose hasty flight for the cabin Lena well remembered.

"Yes, Miss La Rue, we feel it is our duty to remain here, as in their alarm some one might become desperate," cried a second of the deserters.

"True, our families first, the ship afterwards, Miss La Rue," said the third.

Lena La Rue stood gazing from one to the other of the cowardly trio with flashing eyes and a look of scorn, while the weeping and wailing around her momentarily ceased, as in clear, cutting tones, she answered:

"The captain said only cowardly men would remain below decks at such a time, and if the ship is saved, your families will be safe."

"Am I to understand that *you three* stamp yourselves as cowards?"

"Look here, young miss, no man would dare call me a coward," said the pompous individual, while the other two blustered up also.

"Prove that you are not one by going on deck."

"But our duty is here."

"We need not your aid in the cabin, but on the deck."

"Will you go there, or shall I call to Captain Hebron to send a file of men after you?"

This was a thunderbolt into the enemy's camp, and seeing that the maiden was determined as she stepped toward the companionway, the trio of cravens hastily departed, but each one of them muttered savage words against Lena who smiled defiantly, and when they had gone said:

"Now, my friends, we can but wait quietly the end, be it what it may."

"Weeping and groaning will avail you nothing, so try and be calm and accept the alternative bravely."

The effect of the words of the brave girl were magical, for nearly all present became calm, while Lena went among the little ones and quieted their fears as best she could.

Suddenly, over the ship came another shrieking shot, and another crashed through the bulwarks, and cries and groans followed, showing that it had found a victim.

Then the guns of the ship thundered forth in response, and hot and fierce waged the combat.

Crouching on the cabin floor, hugging the children to their hearts, were the frightened women, now silent and appalled, while, by the companionway stood Lena, calm, pale and waiting.

She felt that the ship was yet driving on at full speed, and the roar of the guns told her that they were being fought rapidly and well by the crew, while the deeper toned reports of the larger guns on the schooner, proved that she was firing steadily, slowly, and with precision.

Now and then a sudden shriek of pain, a groan, and a stern order was heard on deck, after a crashing sound that told the pirate had sent a shot home, and yet those below knew not who was falling that was dear to them, and what would be the result.

Hotter and fiercer became the firing, and oftener were groans and cries of pain heard, and the louder reports of the schooner's guns,

told that she was drawing nearer and nearer the ship, and was not flinching from the iron hail poured upon her.

After one fearful crash, evidently, a broadside from the schooner, Lena opened the companionway and sprang up to where she could obtain a view of the deck.

A pall of smoke seemed resting upon the ship, and she knew that the gallant vessel had been hard hit, for it had broached to, and was no longer holding on her swift way over the waters.

As the smoke was blown away by the wind, she saw that the bowsprit was gone the main topmast was shot away, the mizzenmast was tottering, the bulwarks were shattered, and fully a score of dead and wounded men were lying upon the decks.

One glance over the waters showed her the schooner under her clouds of canvas, not three cables' length off, and apparently unhurt, while she was heading directly for the ship.

"Ho, men, the ship's not lost yet!"

"To your guns and rake her as she comes on, and then we'll meet their boarders in gallant style," shouted Captain Hebron in stentorian tones, and glancing toward him, Lena saw that he carried his left arm in a sling but the gallant old sea-dog seemed to care little for the wound.

In dismay, yet determined not to show that she believed all lost, Lena started to return to the cabin, when the schooner poured another broadside upon the devoted ship, and two men came bounding toward the companionway, to dodge into its friendly shelter.

Instantly Lena recognized them as two of the cowardly trio, and quickly she drew a little pistol she carried, and leveled it full in the face of the leading man.

It was the pompous individual, and he drew up suddenly.

"Back! your place is on deck, not here," she cried sternly.

"But the ship is lost," yelled the man.

"There flies her flag, sir, at the peak, and her captain even now calls to her defenders to remain at their posts."

"The captain is a fool, and I'll not lose my life to save his old tub."

"You'll lose it within the minute if you do not go to the rightabout."

"Quick! or I fire, for I have no patience with a coward."

The two men saw that it was certain death there, and a chance for life on deck, and with savage oaths they bounded back to take the chances.

But, struggle as they might, the brave defenders could do no good, and ten minutes after the schooner ran alongside with a shock, scores of men poured upon the ship's decks, and cries for quarter were heard upon all sides, coming from the packet's crew, and Lena La Rue knew that once again she was in the toils of cruel pirates, and her brave heart almost sunk within her at the thought, for all her dreams of hope for the future faded away from before her vision.

CHAPTER XXXV.

A FAIR PRIZE.

"Ah! Miss La Rue, we did all we could, but these red hounds were too much for us," said Captain Hebron, as bareheaded, wounded, and sorrowful he stood by the companionway in irons, and saw the maiden coming toward him.

"You made a noble fight, Captain Hebron, but the guns of the schooner were treble the caliber of those of the ship, and her crew far outnumbered yours; but what is to be done?" said Lena, sadly.

"Nothing can be done, except to see what these red dogs will do with us, though I will give their captain the credit of having made his men spare all who cried for quarter."

"And you, also, who would not cry for quarter, my brave captain," said a pleasant voice, and turning, Lena saw before her a tall, handsome man in black uniform, trimmed with silver lace, and with little the appearance of a buccaneer.

"I am no butcher, my dear captain, if I do sail under the black flag, and I would not have been so hard in my fire on you had I not seen you were not easily whipped."

"For your sake, and those of your crew who suffered, I wish you had surrendered, for I never let go my gripe once I get it on the throat of a foe— Oh, lady, I beg pardon, for I had not observed you," and the young bucca-

neer captain turned toward Lena, who had again stepped from the shadow of the companionway.

"I suppose it would have made no difference, sir, whether you knew that women and children were on board the vessel?" replied Lena.

"I knew there must be both on board, this being a packet-ship, and I trained my guns high, so as not to strike the hull and pierce the cabin; but I did not expect to find a lady on deck amid such a scene as your eyes must necessarily rest upon."

"It is a sight that shows man's inhumanity to man, and his greed for gold, most thoroughly, I admit," said Lena, with a sneer.

The young captain flinched under the shot, and turning to the captain, said:

"Well, sir, what booty have you?"

"Some rich silks, satins and laces, with a few casks of wine, which I hope you will not allow your crew to get drunk on."

"The rest of the cargo is of no value to you."

"Have you none of the king's gold?"

"A little."

"Well, that is what I care most for?"

"Yes, gold is what rules the world."

"Have you many passengers?" asked the buccaneer, without noticing the captain's last remark.

"Yes."

"How many?"

"Nearly half a hundred."

"Many women and children?"

"Two thirds of the number are women and children."

"Then you need your ship to carry them into port, so I suppose are willing to pay for it?"

"Name your price."

"Are you the owner?"

"I own two-thirds of it."

"Then you have suffered enough without paying more, so give me up the best of your valuable cargo, and the king's gold, and you can go on your way, as soon as your vessel is repaired."

"You are generous for a pirate," said the captain bluntly, and he added:

"I thank you most heartily."

"Oh! I shall make up what I lose through you, out of some of your rich passengers."

"Would you rob the passengers?"

"Not exactly, captain; but if there are any of them rich, they can pay for their ransom."

"Are there many on board who are wealthy?"

"I do not know."

"You must certainly know."

"Well, if I did, I would not tell you."

"I believe you, so I will find out from others, for I never care to put the screws too heavily upon a brother sailor, and a brave man such as you have shown yourself to be."

"This lady is very rich sir."

Lena started at the words, and turning quickly beheld the pompous passenger whom she had driven from the cabin, and afterward kept from hiding in the companionway.

He had heard what the buccaneer captain had said, and at once determined upon a revenge against the brave girl, and such as his despicable nature was capable of.

"You are a contemptible cur, and a coward to boot," bluntly said Captain Hebron.

"So I think, sir, but at the same time as the cowardly cur has volunteered important information, I shall act upon it."

"You say this lady is very rich?" and the buccaneer chief turned to the passenger, whose eyes glittered with malicious triumph.

"She is an heiress of New York, and I have heard was once a prisoner to the Ocean Vampire, but escaped without paying a ransom," said the man.

"Indeed!"

"It is the truth, captain, and if report says right, she can pay ransom for the ship and all on board and not feel it."

"You seem to feel a deep hatred against this lady, sir."

"I do," was the honest reply of the man.

"Does he speak the truth, lady?"

"In regard to his hatred of me?"

"That I can see; but are you rich?"

"I am."

"As rich as he says?"

"I inherited over a million," was the frank reply.

"Then you are indeed a fair prize."

"But does he speak the truth in saying you were once the captive of the Ocean Vampire?"

"Yes."

"And escaped?"

"I did."

"Paying no ransom?"

"I paid no ransom."

"Ha! ha! now I have my revenge," cried the man who had betrayed poor Lena.

"Why does this man hate you as he does, may I ask?" inquired the buccaneer.

"He tried, like the coward he is, to remain in the cabin, with two others in the form of men, and I shamed him on deck."

"Ah! I see."

"And more: in the heat of action, when brave men were dying at their guns, he and one other ran to the cabin, but I met him at the companionway with a pistol, and he preferred to take the chances to certain death, and it seems he has escaped, while others with brave hearts have fallen."

Lena La Rue spoke with deep feeling, and the buccaneer captain gazed upon her with admiration, while he laughed lightly at the man who had proven himself such a coward, and so despicably revengeful, and asked:

"Is this man rich, lady?"

"I know not, sir."

"Are you?"

"No, I am a poor man," whined the wretch.

"You do not look it; but how much is your life worth to you?"

"Ah! you will not kill me?" moaned the man.

"How much are you worth to yourself?"

"All I have with me, I'll give you."

"How much is that?"

"I have a thousand doubloons, and some jewels."

"Not enough," was the cool reply.

"Ah, what shall I do?"

"I must have ten thousand dollars."

"Upon my honor I have not got it."

"Have you a family?"

"No, I am alone in the world."

"Then no one will mourn your loss, and for your betrayal of this brave lady you pay me the sum I demand, or up to the yard-arm you go," was the stern response.

"Mercy! mercy! I have not a dollar more than I said."

"Ho, lads! Up to the yard-arm with this wretch," ordered the buccaneer, and half a dozen of his crew sprung forward and seized the man.

"Stay, sir; if you will take my draft on New York I will buy his life, base as he is," said Lena.

"By Heaven! but you are a noble woman."

"No, I shall except no money at your hands for him, but for your sake spare the wretch."

"Go, sir, and know that you owe your life to this lady whom you sought to revenge yourself upon."

"Go!"

The man was upon his knees, but bounded to his feet, aided by a vigorous kick from Captain Hebron, and down the companionway he darted in a manner that threatened to break his neck.

The buccaneer broke forth in ringing laughter, which he quickly checked, and turning to Captain Hebron, he said:

"Well, sir, I will let you levy what ransom you think best upon your passengers, and then go on your way; but this fair passenger, who was once the Vampire's captive, I must detain, as my oath to the Buccaneers' League, and my chief, demands it."

Entreaty, remonstrance, all were vain, and an hour after the two vessels parted, the packet ship to go on her way and the schooner to bear away with her poor Lena La Rue as a captive in her cabin.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

A PIRATE LOVER.

AMONG the Caribbee Islands is one that is still remembered by many aged seamen, as the haunt of buccaneers up to a few years after the close of the war of 1812 between Great Britain and the United States.

Though American cruisers, and for that matter Spanish and English vessels of war, frequently made voyages among the Caribbees from the windward group, up into the Bahamas, in search of buccaneers, they were little benefited thereby, as the haunts were not known, and so situated, that few commanders were willing to be caught in a tornado in the vicinity of many of the isles.

Upon an island of the leeward Caribbees, still an uninhabited rock, there was at the time

the Ocean Vampire swept the seas mercilessly, a buccaneer band, owing allegiance to the Freebooters' League.

This haunt was one of the few that still remained undiscovered by the many cruisers, and in fact was unapproachable save by an experienced pilot.

His other retreats having been broken up, the Vampire had ordered his reserve force to this island, which he made his treasure home.

From the numerous rocky apertures high on the island, vessels could be seen approaching from all quarters; but the closest scrutiny with powerful glasses from the decks of the cruisers, failed to show the slightest sign of habitation, and the surrounding waters seemed wholly impassable to the keel of a ship even of a few tons.

Standing upon the summit of this island one afternoon, a month after the boarding of the brig by the pirate brigantine, were two persons, watching a vessel coming shoreward under a six-knot breeze.

One of the persons was a man with a dark Spanish face, cruel black eyes, and dressed in duck pants, white woolen shirt, and a palm-leaf hat, while his waist was encircled by a belt containing a dagger and a pair of double-barrel pistols.

His companion was a young girl, whose sad face the reader has seen before, for it was none other than Lena La Rue.

She was attired in a Spanish costume, and her beautiful face wore a look of anxiety, as she asked faintly:

"Do you think it is the chief, Senor Capitan?"

"I cannot think who else it can be, Senorita La Rue, that comes so directly toward the island," was the answer of the Spaniard.

"But it is not his vessel, as I can see."

"No, it is not the trim little brigantine, I admit, senorita, but then you know the Vampire is daily engaged in combats at sea, and he may have lost his vessel and been forced to take the one coming hither."

"God grant that it be not that man," cried Lena fervently.

"For your sake, senorita, I say amen to your prayer, for you know the Vampire as well as I do, and hence I offer you means of escape."

He looked into her beautiful face earnestly, and she turned upon him with a glance of scorn, while she said with deep sarcasm:

"You offer me means of escape, Captain Morena? You ask me to save myself from the Vampire by becoming the wife of his lieutenant, only second to him for deeds of cruelty."

The swarthy face flushed at her words, and the Spaniard gave response:

"Let us understand each other, Senorita La Rue."

"I, Juan Morena, am a member of the Buccaneer League, in fact the only commander besides the chief, known as the Vampire, who remains upon the seas."

"My oath of allegiance to the League, binds me to him, and hence, when I captured the packet-ship, upon which you were a passenger, and found that you had been the prisoner of my chief once before, my duty compelled me to yield you up to him."

"I brought you here to leave with my tithe of my captures, due the Vampire, but loving you, could not bear the thought of leaving you in his power."

"Once I was a man of honor, a Spanish noble, and an officer of the navy of Spain; but I conspired against my king, and fled to save my head, and turned my vessel into a pirate."

"Now I am a hunted man, and have done many a red deed; but since I saw your face, my hand has been raised against no man, and my heart bows down to you as its idol."

"Silence, sir, for I will not listen to such words from a pirate's lips," said Lena La Rue, haughtily.

"You will be forced to listen to far different from the Vampire's lips, fair lady, or I know not the man; but, do not cast me from you with scorn, evil though I be, for I swear to you that I will give up the crime-stained life I lead, and fly with you to the United States, there to become an honorable man, for in your love I can banish the past."

"If yonder is the Vampire, and I believe it is his vessel, I will not report your capture to him as the one that you are, but keep you from his sight on board my own vessel, and, as soon

as he is gone, we will sail to Florida, where I will make you my wife, and never will I return to piracy.

"Speak, senorita, and say what you will do."

He looked entreatingly into her face, and her eyes were on the coming vessel, and not on him.

Suddenly, while he awaited anxiously her reply, she said:

"Your glass, please."

He handed it to her and she turned it upon the approaching vessel.

Long she looked at it, while her face paled and flushed by turns, and then returning it to him she said, calmly:

"I will await the coming of yonder vessel, Senor Captain Morena, to decide what my fate shall be."

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE SAIL IN THE OFFING.

THAT the Spanish pirate was deeply pained at the reply of Lena La Rue, there could be no doubt, for, born to a far different life, he had yet never before met a woman whom he loved, and the sweet face of the beautiful American girl had wholly changed his crime-stained life.

To gain her for himself was his honorable intention, and to feel that she would be in the power of the Vampire was madness to him.

The crimes against him were great, yet he was by no means the monster that the pirate chief was.

He had robbed on the high seas, and killed to rob, yet had not been cruel to those in his power, or inhuman in his acts.

To feel that Lena preferred to await the coming of the Vampire and risk mercy at his vile hands rather than become his wife, cut him to the heart.

But not one word of upbraiding did he offer, and only said:

"Well, senorita, if you find that the Vampire is merciless, call upon me for succor, and I will risk my life to save you, and will hold you to no promise to me for so doing."

"I thank you, senor," and with sudden impulse she offered her hand.

He grasped it eagerly, bent over and pressed a kiss upon the tips of the slender, shapely fingers, and again turned his eyes upon the approaching vessel, which was now but a short league distant.

"If she puts her helm up, after passing yonder ripple on the water, which hides a reef, senorita, I will know that it is the Vampire returning," said Captain Morena.

Both eagerly watched the coming vessel from their retreat among the rocks, where the most searching eye on the vessel could hardly detect them, and as the strange sail swept by the sunken reef, her course was suddenly changed.

"She is not coming to the island," cried Lena, as the vessel's stern was turned toward them.

"On the contrary, she is, senorita; see, she again changes her course suddenly and is following the channel."

"A most serpentine channel," said the maiden.

"Yes; you were asleep when I ran the schooner in that afternoon, and had you not been, you would have seen what a steady hand and perfect nerve it takes to bring a vessel in here, without trying to compliment myself."

"I have heard that there were only half a dozen in the Buccaneer League could run in by day, and the Vampire and yourself alone by night," said Lena, watching with considerable interest the winding of the vessel through the channel.

"I know of no one living now, excepting the Vampire and myself that can do so by day or night."

"Years ago this was a rendezvous but was given up on account of the dangerous channel, and other islands selected, for we were not so hunted down then, senorita, as now."

"First, to run in, one must get the strength of the wind, and the exact speed of the vessel; then, after rounding that ripple, it is all done by count, and not by the eye."

"Indeed?"

"Yes, for instance, if that vessel is now sailing five knots to the hour, after passing yonder ripple she holds on due west for just one minute; if six knots an hour, she holds on for forty-five seconds, and then goes about and holds east by south, for three minutes."

"She is making now five knots, according to my count," and Captain Morena took from his pocket a gold watch and timed the different courses of the vessel.

"You are mistaken in believing that it is the Vampire at the helm," said Lena, who was watching the craft most attentively through the glass.

Instantly the Spaniard held forth his hand for the glass, and with one glance through it, exclaimed:

"*Santa Maria!* it is a mere boy."

"Yes, senor, so he seems."

"Yet he is alone at the wheel, and not left there, as it were for an instant."

"True, for he has made the different change of courses without assistance, or apparent order."

"That is most strange; there! he has rounded the Devil's Lance, a sharp, sunken rock, as well as the Vampire could have done."

"Who can he be, I wonder?" and it was evident that the Spaniard was greatly surprised.

The maiden made no reply and the pirate captain continued:

"It cannot be that some one has betrayed the secret, among the pilots."

"No, no, for no one would dare bring a vessel in with such knowledge only told him, without first coming in a small boat and testing it, for that channel leads through solid rock bottom, and a mistake would send a craft to destruction."

"The vessel flies the Vampire flag at its peak, though I do not see the chief on her deck."

"I see three officers standing together, not far from the wheel," said Lena.

"Yes, and they are watching the island most attentively."

"Can aught have befallen the Vampire?" and the Spaniard's eyes flashed as though with hope that he had been killed.

"God grant that there has," was Lena La Rue's fervent reponse.

"Then, lady, you are safe, for I am chief of the League," was the quick reply.

"I recognize no face on the vessel that I have seen below," again said the Spaniard.

"I do."

"You, senorita?"

"Yes; you forget that I was once the prisoner of the Black Pirate, and who is now known as the Vampire?"

"Ah yes, and you recognize his officers?"

"Yes, one of them, as Lieutenant St. Vale, whom I once esteemed as a man of honor; but now fallen so low as to be a lieutenant under the Vampire," said Lena La Rue with scorn.

The Spaniard's face flushed, but he said calmly.

"I never met the officer you speak of, senorita, though I have heard often of him, from different men of the League, and if you recognize him on the vessel she comes in good faith, and not as I had begun to fear, with foes, led by treachery."

"Come, let us retrace our way, for I must meet her commander when he lands."

He politely offered his hand, to escort the maiden; but refusing it, she walked by his side down the steep path leading to the center of the island, which was in the shape of a bowl, with precipitous sides seaward, and sloping toward the interior down to a basin, toward which the strange sail was making her way through walls of rock, in which no break was visible half a mile away from the wild coast.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE MUTINY.

I LEFT Leon St. Vale upon the deck of the brig, which Sailor Frank had gotten in Baltimore, and manned with a large crew, in the hope of capturing the Ocean Vampire by a cunning and well-planned plot.

The reader has seen that the Ocean Vampire believed Leon St. Vale to be left dead on the deck of the vessel, and sailed away in hot haste, too glad at his escape from the trap into which he had been led, to linger longer in the vicinity of the craft styling itself the Mercedes, and in which he had expected to capture a treasure.

After retreating to the shelter of an island for repairs, and to bury the dead and look after the wounded, Leon St. Vale held a long conversation with his daring and able young ally as to what was best to be done.

He had, after long months of waiting, watch-

ing, plotting and hoping, decided upon a course to get the Vampire into his power, and it had been unsuccessful.

But he did not despair, for the one aim of his life was to wipe from him the stain he had been forced to bear, and to track his hated foe, who had so dishonored him, to the bitter end.

Being far from the brigantine, and believed to be dead, was greatly in his favor, added to which was the circumstance that his faithful friend and ally, Sailor Frank, was alive and with him, and that the two were on the deck of a swift-sailing vessel, with a crew under their command.

True, the so-called Mercedes was not armed, and manned with men of whom little was known.

Yet Leon St. Vale felt that he had gained a great point in getting the vessel, and as for the men, he would soon know if they were true or false.

After the wounded had been faithfully cared for, and the dead sewed in canvas, their feet shotted, and thrown overboard, Leon St. Vale called to Sailor Frank to come near.

"Now, Frank, I will see what material we have to work with," he said.

"I fear, after all, it is poor material," answered the boy, in a low tone.

"What do you mean?"

"They are growling savagely, sir."

"What about?"

"They expected to capture the Vampire."

"But did not."

"There's the rub."

"How?"

"They one and all expected to get rich by the capture of the Vampire's vessel, and fought well to do so."

"And will still fight for that end."

"I fear not, sir."

"Why?"

"Because they were unsuccessful."

"Bah! they must try again."

"I hope they will, but fear not."

"They shall."

"We are but two, Lieutenant St. Vale."

"Against two-score?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, I do not yield until I am conquered, so shall stand no nonsense from the men."

"Hold the deck until I thoroughly arm myself."

St. Vale went into the cabin and reloaded the weapons he wore, besides buckling others around him, and returning to the deck bade Frank go and do likewise.

In the mean time the crew had assembled forward, and were openly discussing the turn affairs had taken.

While there was an atom of hope of the capture of the pirate vessel, with its rich treasure, they had indeed fought well; but when the Vampire, after punishing them most severely, had escaped, they did not enter into the idea of St. Vale to follow on after the buccaneer, with the hope of eventually making him a prisoner, and his vessel a prize.

Had the Mercedes been armed with heavy guns, and had a crew treble their number, they would have been more than willing to go on the cruise; but as it was they were not, and boldly said so.

"Go forward, Frank, and order the men aft," said St. Vale, calmly.

Sailor Frank shook his head dubiously, but without a word walked forward.

Whatever the result he would stand by the lieutenant.

But he hoped that St. Vale would be willing to return to Baltimore and enlist a larger crew, secretly arm the Mercedes, and then go in pursuit of the pirate chief.

"Lads, the captain wants you aft."

"He has a yarn to spin, and it's my advice you take it kindly," said the youth in his off-hand way, as he walked into the midst of the discontented and grumbling seamen.

"We'll hear his yarn, sir, and then we has one to spin, and it'll be to his interest to hear it kindly," boldly, yet politely said one of the men, who was, to all appearances, the leader of the malcontents.

"You'll find he is not the man to give advice to on his own deck, lads, and I advise you not to offer it," replied Frank.

"You did the shipping of this crew," said one.

"Yes, under his orders."

"Well, we'll see; come, lads, let us hear what the cap'n has to say, and then we can act to suit ourselves."

"That's so," was the general chorus, and the crew moved aft in a body.

Frank glided on ahead in his easy way, and took his stand by Leon St. Vale, who stood on the poop-deck near the wheel.

The crew halted by common consent, and St. Vale glanced over them, allowing his burning eyes to catch for an instant the gaze of each one of the two-score men in front of him.

"Well, lads, I sent for you to have a talk with you, and then we'll decide what is best to be done for our good," said St. Vale in his pleasant way, and with a smile which few could resist the fascination of.

"We has decided already, no matter what you says," was the sullen reply of a man standing in the front rank.

Hardly had the words left his lips when he was seized in an iron grasp, and the fist of St. Vale was driven into his face with a force that laid him senseless upon the deck.

"I command this vessel, men, and will allow no interference," was the calm remark, as St. Vale stood facing the crowd, his foot upon the breast of the fallen man, and his attitude that of a tiger at bay.

So astounded were the crew at the bold act of their captain, and so quickly had the insolent remark of one of their number been punished, that they stood aghast, gazing upon St. Vale in silent awe.

He quickly saw the advantage he had gained, and at once said:

"Lads, I feel that this insolent dog beneath my feet was not your spokesman, and now that he is silenced I will have my talk with you."

Not a man spoke, and Leon St. Vale went on:

"For a long time I have been a captive to the Ocean Vampire, and he has wronged me as you do not know, and can never know.

"This young gentleman knows all that I have suffered through the Vampire, as I do what he has been made to suffer, and we are sworn to avenge ourselves.

"Our plan to take him by a ruse, for which you were enlisted, fell through, and now we are determined to proceed in a safer and more sure way.

"What my plan is I will not divulge, but I need your aid, and will enrich all those who are with me when I haul down the Vampire flag.

"What say you, lads, is there one who refuses to go with me?"

"We have no guns, sir," said a voice.

"That is my, not your look-out, my lad."

"We are but a few, sir," said another.

"If taken by the Vampire I will be the greatest sufferer, and I am willing to take the chances with the few I have."

"I, for one, will not go on such a foolhardy expedition," said one.

"And I'm with you, Jack!" cried another.

"And me."

"Count me, too, for no fool."

"No Vampire to hang us."

Such were the cries that arose from the crowd, and as each one spoke Leon St. Vale fixed his eyes upon them and said, sternly:

"Then I am to understand that you are mutineers, am I?"

"That's just what you are to understand, luff," was the bold reply of one who seemed to be a self-appointed ringleader, unmindful of his predecessor, who was still beneath the foot of Leon St. Vale, lying as quiet as though life had left his body forever.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

IN THE WAKE OF REVENGE.

In glancing over the crew Leon St. Vale seemed to read that his little speech had had a good effect with two-thirds of those to whom he spoke, and felt that they were willing to be governed and guided by him in his pursuit of the Ocean Vampire.

But the same glance had shown him also that there were some discontented spirits among the crew, who wished to rule him and carry their point, and so these remarks, as they stepped to the front as mutineers, did not surprise him or for one instant disconcert him.

In response to the remark of the ringleader, he replied in unruffled tones:

"Then as you are so few in numbers who propose to mutiny against my authority, I will not ask for assistance in quelling you, but order you forward at once."

"Suppose we won't go?" said the ringleader, sullenly.

"Then, sir, I shall kill you," was the cool reply.

"Do you mean you'll set yourself against two-score of gallant fellows?"

"I mean that you and your mutineer comrades shall obey me.

"Forward, I say, or take the consequences."

Some urged to obey, others to keep firm, and the ringleader made a spring for St. Vale.

He seemed to anticipate it, and sprung backward, at the same time drawing a pistol in each hand, and firing both weapons as though both had been discharged by the pulling of one trigger.

Dropping the pistols to the deck, he drew his sword and cut a third mutineer down, and was pressing upon a fourth, when the true men of the crew seized the others and dragged them back, while one of their number cried:

"I guess this will be lesson enough, captain, and we'll bring these hot-heads round."

"See that you do, or I'll string them up to the yard-arm within the hour," was the stern reply.

It was evident to the crew that the mutineers had caught a Tartar in Leon St. Vale, and the prompt manner in which he acted, added to his deadly work and fearless mien, raised him at once in the estimation of the majority, who felt that he was the very man to cling to in the cruise after the Ocean Vampire, and to capture him, if in the power of mortal to do so.

Hurrying their mutinous comrades forward, they soon prevailed upon them to return aft and beg the pardon of their daring commander, for the mutineers were only too glad to have escaped with their lives.

There were five of them, and they marched aft in a body, and approached St. Vale, who appeared to take no notice of their coming, although his eagle eyes saw them, and he divined the cause of their coming.

"Well, lads?" he said, with no show of anger, as they halted near him.

"We have come to say we was wrong, sir, and we'll stick to you, cruise where you may," frankly said the spokesman.

"That's right, my men, for I am one who will have my own way.

"Now toss these dead bodies into the sea, and go forward to your duties," was the reply.

The men did as ordered, but the first mutineer, who had remained motionless, even after returning to consciousness after the stunning blow given him, sat up as they approached him, with the evident intention of pitching him overboard, and cried:

"Avast there, shipmates, and give me a chance to beg pardon of the captain."

"You are lucky to be able to do so, my lad, and I warn you that next time it will not be my fist that sends you down."

The seaman saluted and hurried forward, only too happy to have escaped, for having been first to start the trouble, and seeing the three dead bodies near him, which had fallen by St. Vale's hand, he had feared for his life, did he show signs of not being also dead.

After a conversation with Frank, St. Vale determined to at once get under way, and the crew were called up, divided in watches, one of their number was appointed acting third officer, and another boatswain, after which the anchor was weighed, and the brig headed down the Chesapeake.

St. Vale well knew that he was sailing a vessel with no papers to justify him; but the end justified him, and he was only too happy to be in the wake of the Ocean Vampire, and avenge himself, to care what means he used.

"Which way, sir?" asked the newly-appointed officer, when the brig had gained an offing from the Chesapeake, and was upon the broad bosom of the Atlantic.

"Keep her south, sir, for the Bahamas is our destination," was the stern reply.

CHAPTER XL.

THE SECRET SYMBOL.

To the outward gaze of seamen, sailing by, the Pirates' Rock seemed wholly inaccessible, and yet within its natural walls were spots of verdure, surrounding the very small basin that seemed bottomless, for no anchor cable had been found long enough to find its depth.

Once the vessel had passed through the outer channel, and it had to be warped into the basin, where it was certainly in a safe harbor from storms and foes.

Into this haven the strange vessel had found its way, under the pilotage of the youth

whom the Pirate Captain and Lena La Rue had seen at her helm.

Around the basin were adobe huts, to accommodate those living on shore, when their vessels were in port, and one cabin had been rudely and strongly built of roughly hewn stone.

This was the Treasure-house, and here were kept the tithes of the different captains of the League.

As the cruisers had been of late so hotly pursuing the buccaneers, and had captured a number of them, the only contribution of tithe money, or goods, in the Treasure-house there was what had been placed there by Captain Juan Morena.

From this store he had amply supplied Lena La Rue with clothing since she had been a prisoner on the island.

Poor girl, she had often wished that she had gone with Lady Eve, instead of starting on her return to New York, for then she would have escaped becoming a pirates' captive for the second time.

Remaining upon the island constantly were a dozen rude men, left by their chief, and who did not have a boat in which to leave it, should occasion offer.

With these men Captain Morena, to his honor be it said, would not leave Lena La Rue, and consequently he had kept his vessel in port day after day.

The other passengers, and the crew of the packet ship, on which she had been captured while en route from Halifax to New York, he had, as was his custom, allowed to continue on after robbing the vessel, keeping the maiden alone for ransom, he said, though at the first sight of her he had been infatuated with her beauty.

Hence she was the only captive on the island, and a young and lovely maiden amid four-score fierce outlaws.

But, in spite of his crime-stained life the maiden had been drawn toward Juan Morena, for in him alone she saw was her only protection.

The schooner lying in the haven was a craft of two hundred tons, and as beautiful a vessel as any that skimmed the seas.

More gaunt in build than the brigantine of the Vampire, and drawing more water, she was a better seaboat, and on several occasions when the two buccaneer captains had met at sea, the Consuelo, as Morena had named his schooner, had each time shown the flag-ship a clean pair of heels, greatly to the chief's chagrin, for he liked not that one of his officers should have a vessel that outsailed him.

Taking great pride in his schooner, and convinced that in her speed, armament and crew was his protection from the gallows, Juan Morena had made her all that any commander could wish, and many a time had he boldly run into the Atlantic ports and passed off as a Spanish, Brazilian or French man-of-war, for he was an accomplished linguist and spoke other tongues than his own without the slightest accent.

As the cabin of the schooner was by far preferable to the adobe huts ashore, Lena had remained on board, the Spaniard having resigned his quarters to her.

Upon reaching the basin she had consequently gone on board the schooner, accompanied by Captain Morena, and reached the deck, just as the strange vessel's bowsprit was visible, pointing into the little harbor.

Slowly she came forward, watched attentively by all on board the schooner, who made no preparations that were hostile, as Juan Morena had noticed that she carried no armament.

Laying alongside the rocky shore, as did the schooner, the strange vessel was made fast, and two persons sprung ashore.

"Yes, it is Leon St. Vale," said Lena La Rue, in a low tone, and she added, as her eyes fell upon his companion:

"The other is that strange youth who was so kind to me on the other island, when I was a captive, and who sprung into the sea that night we were all starving, and whom we believed to be drowned."

Seeing that the two from the strange vessel were coming on board the schooner, Captain Morena advanced and met them as they came over the gangway, and politely raising his hat said:

"Lieutenant St. Vale, I believe?"

"My name is St. Vale, senior, and my young lieutenant here informs me that you are Cap-

tain Juan Morena, of the Buccaneer League," answered St. Vale, coldly.

"I am, senor; may I ask regarding our chief, the Vampire?"

"My dear captain, I am chief of this island now," was St. Vale's cool reply.

"Hal the Vampire is dead then?" cried the Spaniard, with unfeigned joy.

"Whether dead or alive, senor, I have come to assume command here."

"By the Virgin, senor lieutenant, but you talk boldly, for you forget, or do not know, that I am the ranking officer under the Vampire."

"I care not, Senor Morena, what rank you hold, for I have in my possession the secret symbol of the League, that all must obey, and in the name of these gold fetters I command your obedience and dare you to oppose me."

As Leon St. Vale spoke, his voice rung out like a clarion, and he drew from his breast pocket a pair of gold manacles, the sight of which caused Juan Morena to start back with a half-suppressed cry, and every seaman near to instantly doff his tarpaulin.

CHAPTER XLI.

THE FIGHT FOR THE FETTERS.

As Leon St. Vale drew the gold manacles from his breast, and shook them in the face of Juan Morena, his eye suddenly fell upon Lena La Rue, standing not ten paces distant, and gazing upon him in rapt attention.

At this unexpected sight, the maiden seeming to rise like an apparition before him, his dark face flushed crimson, and then the hot blood receded and left him deathly pale.

Instantly Juan Morena, the surroundings were forgotten, and the Fetters of Gold dropped from his hand and fell upon the deck.

"You here, Miss La Rue?" he gasped, and started toward her.

Instantly Frank sprung forward to seize the manacles which he had let fall; but he was not quick enough, as Juan Morena had seized them, while a cry of joy broke from his lips.

"Ah, senor, you are undone! See! he has the Golden Fetters!"

The cry came from the youth, and the seeming anguish in his voice caused Leon St. Vale to turn toward him.

He saw the youth, white and trembling, pointing to Captain Morena, who, with a face of exultant joy, stood facing him.

"Well, what is it, Frank?" he demanded, sternly.

"Senor, have you forgotten that if that symbol goes from your possession, no matter how, it gives to the one who holds it the power?" cried the youth.

Leon St. Vale had not forgotten this fact, for he had never known it; but the adroit manner in which the young sailor had told him convinced him that he had made a sad mistake, and suddenly lost his power over all the buccaneers.

What to do to regain it he did not know.

His crew, with which he had come to the island, did not number but thirty-five men, while he saw at a glance the pirates were over four-score.

To fight them would be impossible, and he keenly felt the unfortunate position he had gotten himself into.

He had come to the island for one purpose, and that was to lay a trap to catch the Vampire when next he should visit it.

Once before he had been there, while on the brigantine, and Frank had told him he could run the vessel in, as he had studied the channel chart and all its directions, and years before had twice run a vessel in and out.

Could he get there and lay some plan to entrap the Vampire, all would go well; but he had arrived to find there the pirate schooner of Captain Juan Morena, and the quick wit of the youth had told him to at once proclaim himself chief, in the name of the Golden Fetters, and thus become the commander of the Consuelo, as the captain would not dare dispute his authority as long as he bore the secret symbol.

This he had done, and the respect shown the Fetters by the pirate crew had convinced him that all would be well, when the intense surprise at beholding Lena La Rue, whom he believed safe in New York, had caused him to drop the revered symbol of the League from his hand.

Like a tiger at bay he glared upon the Spaniard, seemingly about to spring upon him, and wrest the Fetters from his grasp.

But a warning word from the youth restrained him, and then the lad said, in distinct tones:

"You can claim your right, senor, to demand of the holder of those Fetters—so that he does not wear them upon his wrists in disgrace—that he meet you in the *duello* to see who shall live to wield the power they give."

"By Heaven, Senor Spaniard, I do claim that right, so name your own weapons and meet me face to face to see who shall claim them," cried St. Vale, his interest in regaining the manacles having caused him to almost forget the presence of Lena La Rue.

But like a statue she stood, seeing all and hearing all, and wondering how it would end.

One moment she thought she would ask the Spaniard for her sake to return the Fetters to St. Vale; but then it would compromise her in the sight of the very man she would least care to be under obligations to, and he might expect her in return to degrade herself by becoming his wife.

Then if the two men fought, and Leon St. Vale conquered, she hoped and believed she would be safe with him; but if on the contrary he fell, then she would still remain in the power of the Spaniard, with the chance of yet falling into the hands of the Vampire.

Thus feeling and dreading, she determined to remain quiet and await the result.

When St. Vale proposed to meet him in single combat to decide the right to possess the Golden Fetters, Juan Morena smiled pleasantly in acquiescence, and the smile was reflected upon the faces of his crew.

It was evident that the Spaniard had confidence in his own skill and nerve, and that his men felt as he did in the matter of a *duello*.

From his earliest boyhood he had been noted as a finished swordsman, and his many encounters had but steeled his arm and added to his perfect confidence in himself.

As a pistol shot too he was a marksman of deadly aim, and he felt not the slightest doubt as to how an affair with either weapon must end.

"Do you acquiesce in my demand, senor?" asked Leon St. Vale.

"Willingly, senor; I will be only too charmed to maintain my right to the Fetters with my sword," was the smiling reply.

"You select the sword then?"

"Yes, if the senor does not prefer the pistol."

"It is a matter of indifference to me, senor."

"Shall the matter be settled now?"

"It must be within the hour," said Frank, and he added:

"That is the law that goes with the Golden Fetters."

"I am wholly at your service, senor," and the Spaniard bowed.

St. Vale quietly drew his sword, tried the temper of the blade by bending it almost double, and then asked:

"How does it compare with the length of your blade, Senor Morena?"

The Spaniard stepped forward, and the two weapons were placed together.

"Mine is an inch the longest," said the Spaniard.

"It is of no consequence, senor," smiled St. Vale.

"I care not to take unfair advantage of you, senor."

"It matters not."

"I warn you that I am a thorough master of my weapon," suggested Juan Morena.

"I am glad you are, as the sport will be the more interesting," was St. Vale's cool rejoinder.

The Spaniard arched his brows in surprise at this, for he saw that he at least had a man of consummate nerve to deal with, and who had the utmost confidence in himself, whatever his skill as a swordsman might prove.

St. Vale, who wore the uniform of the buccaneers, black cloth, trimmed with silver lace, quietly threw aside his belt, containing the scabbard of his sword, a dagger and a pair of silver-mounted pistols, and stepped in front of the Spaniard.

Instantly the pirate captain confronted the Englishman, and as they appeared, their swords presented, they were certainly two very handsome men.

Upon the face of the Spaniard was cool confidence, while the countenance of St. Vale showed only the utmost indifference.

All the pirates had gathered in a circle

around the adversaries, leaving a lane open at one side for Lena La Rue to see through, an act of courtesy on their part she proved her appreciation of by advancing nearer.

From the face of St. Vale the pirates turned their eyes upon Frank, the sailor lad, several of whom knew him, and saw that he, too, seemed to feel little concern, or at least to show it, as to what the result might be.

Seeing that something of an unusual kind was going on, the crew of the brig came to the rock, against which the schooner was moored, and looked down upon the scene.

They were a hardy, fearless set of men, and were ready to defend their young leader if need be, for St. Vale in the cruise out had endeared himself to all his crew.

"I am ready, Sir Spaniard," said St. Vale, calmly.

Juan Morena bowed, and the blades clashed together with a ring that made every man start.

And then each combatant felt the power of the other's arm, and knew what was before him.

Ere a dozen passes had been made the swarthy face of the Spaniard had changed its confident look, for superb swordsman that he was, and that his men knew him to be, he felt that he had met his master.

As for Leon St. Vale, the same look of indifference rested upon his handsome, stern face; but yet he pressed his adversary harder and harder, forced him to give back step by step, until he stood with his back to the schooner's bulwarks, and then by a dextrous movement, struck the sword of his foe from his hand, and drove his own keen blade through his body, pinning him to the oaken side of the vessel.

The face of Juan Morena grew livid, his eyes rolled wildly, and he fixed them upon Lena La Rue, who stood horror-bound and speechless, while St. Vale cried in his deep, ringing voice, as he tore the manacles of gold from the grasp of his adversary, who had fought with them in his left hand:

"Now, Sir Spaniard, I claim these Golden Fetters, and the rights that go with them, from the Ocean Vampire!"

CHAPTER XLII.

THE MERCHANT BRIG SAILS ON A MISSION.

To say that the crew of the schooner and the few island guards stood aghast at the result of the duel, would be but to mildly express it, for they had believed that Juan Morena was the equal of even the Vampire with the sword.

The men of the brig could scarcely restrain a shout of delight in honor of their commander; but were warned by a look from Frank not to do so.

Wrenching the sword from the Spaniard's body, St. Vale turned on his heel as the body fell to the deck, and again stood face to face with Lena La Rue.

She was as white as marble, trembling, and her lips seemed unable to articulate.

But St. Vale had regained his composure, which the first sight of her had upset, and raised his hat, while he said, politely:

"I had not anticipated the honor of seeing Miss La Rue here."

"I assure you, sir, it is an honor I do not crave, as you find me, as upon a former occasion, the captive of pirates," she haughtily answered, regaining her composure, with which to confront his easy manner.

"Ah! you are unfortunate indeed; may I ask how it is that you are here? When last I saw you, your vessel was bound to dear old England."

"That voyage, Lieutenant St. Vale may remember, met with an interruption, and returning to Halifax I took a packet for New York, which was captured by the pirate captain whom you have just slain," and Lena offset the manner of St. Vale with a tone as equally cool and indifferent as his own.

"And the Lady Eve?"

His eyes momentarily drooped as he asked the question and spoke her name.

"Went on to England under the escort of Captain Cuthbert, to make Castle Curse her home."

"I need not tell Miss La Rue, that she is no longer a captive, as I am chief here, and that she will be restored in honor to her home."

He changed the subject of conversation so abruptly, and his words were such delicious music to poor Lena's ears, that her reserve

at once melted, and, in trying to thank him, she burst into tears.

"Frank, kindly see Miss La Rue to the cabin, and join me again," said St. Vale, and as the youth led the weeping, almost hysterical girl away, he turned and glanced his flashing eyes over the crew of the schooner, while he asked in his deep tones:

"Who is the ranking officer under Captain Morena?"

A seaman stepped forward from the group, and answered, as he touched his tarpaulin in man-of-war's style:

"I am bo'sen sir; but the captain never left the schooner, exceptin', here at the island, and never had an officer, for he was all aboard his craft, as we all knew."

Just then Frank returned from the cabin, and St. Vale said:

"Frank, as on the brig, you are my first lieutenant, and you, Mr. Hoodly are second, and Merival third, on this vessel, while you, my man, continue your duties as boatswain."

Ordering the dead Spaniard to be given a decent burial, he looked the schooner over and seemed charmed with his tour of inspection.

Then he examined the stores in the treasure-house, and calling the roll, found that he had just one hundred and fifteen men, including his own crew from the brig.

Having stationed a look-out on the upper cliff, to give warning of the approach of any vessel, and especially the Vampire's brigantine, he sent Frank to Lena La Rue, to ask the honor of an interview.

She readily granted it, and he found her somewhat nervously awaiting his coming.

"Miss La Rue," he said, in a low, distinct tone, as he took his seat:

"I have come to say to you that as I may be detained for a long time upon this island, I am at your service to bear you to one who will gladly assume protection of you."

She made no reply, but her looks questioned him as to whom he referred.

"I happen to know," he continued, that the Petrel, Lieutenant Lord Cecil Milnor commanding, is in the port of St. John's, in the Island of Antigua, undergoing repairs, and I am willing to take you there and place you under his care, if you will make me one promise."

"What promise would you have me make you, Lieutenant St. Vale?"

"That you will not make known the existence on this island of any human being or that it is a piratical haunt."

"If I refuse, sir?"

"I shall be necessitated to detain you here then, until I accomplish the purpose I have in view."

"And then?"

"I will, as I before told you, return you in all honor to your friends."

"And to accomplish your purpose you may take some time?"

"Months, perhaps."

"Then I gladly make you the promise you ask of me."

"Thank you, Miss La Rue, and rest content that very soon you will be under the protection of Lord Milnor."

"As long as you remain on this vessel this cabin is wholly at your service."

He rose as he spoke to take his leave, when the words broke passionately from the lips of poor Lena:

"Oh, Leon St. Vale, how could you become what you have, the leader of pirates?"

St. Vale turned very white at the abrupt question, and his lip quivered; but, with an effort of his iron will he answered firmly:

"Miss La Rue, my motives for becoming what I am, I must keep to myself, and I beg that from your lips I hear no bitter denunciations and recriminations, for the load I now bear is a heavy one indeed."

"For the past I offer no explanation, and for the future I have only hope."

He turned abruptly and left the cabin, and he carried with him the full sympathy and not the hatred and contempt of Lena La Rue.

The following morning, to the surprise of the schooner's crew, St. Vale ordered two-score of them on board of the brig, and left the remainder on their vessel, with the men that had come to the island with him.

Taking with him only Frank as an officer, and having escorted Lena into the cabin, he set sail in the brig, and skillfully piloted out to sea by the youth, laid his course for the Island of Antigua.

Arriving at the seaport of St. John's he boldly ran in in broad daylight and dropped anchor not a quarter of a mile from the English brig of war Petrel.

"Miss La Rue, there is Lord Cecil's vessel, and as soon as it is dark I will have him come on board to take you under his charge," said St. Vale, addressing the maiden, who stood near him, as the brig ran in to her anchorage.

"From my heart I thank you, Lieutenant St. Vale, and I beg that you will not run useless risks on my account," returned the maiden, warmly.

St. Vale smiled, but made no reply, and Lena counted the weary moments until sunset.

Then, as she stood on deck looking over the quiet harbor, her heart gave a bound as she heard the order:

"Frank, carry this letter on board the Petrel, lying at anchor yonder, and ask for Lord Cecil Milnor to whom give it."

The youth called a boat alongside, sprung in, and soon stood on the Petrel's deck.

Lord Cecil was pacing the quarter-deck, smoking a cigar, after his supper.

"A messenger with a letter for you, sir," said a middy.

He seized the letter, and breaking the seal, read by the aid of the binnacle light:

"Will Lieutenant Lord Cecil Milnor kindly visit an old friend on the American merchant brig Mercedes?"

"The bearer will bring him to the vessel and return with him on board the Petrel."

"My lad, there is no name signed to this, though the writing has a familiar look," said the young noble, glancing suspiciously at Frank, who promptly replied:

"Your friend wished to surprise you, sir."

"Ah! well, I will accompany you," and turning to his lieutenant he said, in a low tone:

"Keep your eye on yonder brig, Vernon, and if she attempts to leave the harbor bring her to."

"Better let me send an armed boat with you, sir," said the cautious officer.

"Oh, no; I shall go armed, and if I need aid will fire a pistol; but it looks as though it would be all right."

So saying Lord Cecil descended into the boat alongside, in which were two oarsmen, and took a seat alongside of Frank, who held the tiller ropes.

"Give way, lads," and the boat moved back toward the brig, anxiously watched from the Petrel, for the crew liked not seeing their commander trust himself off alone as he did.

CHAPTER XLIII.

BETWEEN TWO FIRES.

As the boat neared the brig Lord Cecil saw a trim-looking craft of something over three hundred tons, with clean rigging, and all looking ship-shape about her, and a few heads gazing over the bulwarks at his approach.

"Way 'nough!" said the youth, and the oarsmen ceased pulling.

The next moment the boat touched the gangway, there it was grasped by a seaman, and Frank and Lord Cecil stepped out.

"Keep the boat ready for the gentleman's return."

Lord Cecil heard the order given and went forward with renewed confidence.

Into the cabin Frank led him, and bidding him be seated, said, simply:

"The captain will join you at once, sir."

"The captain? Who in the name of Neptune is it that I am to see?" murmured the young noble.

And, as the words left his lips, he saw a handsomely-booted and small foot step down the cabin companionway, and then the tall form of a man stood before him.

"Great God! Leon St. Vale!"

The words burst from the lips of the young nobleman, and starting back, he dropped his hand upon the hilt of his sword.

"Hold! Lord Cecil Milnor, you, of all men, are the last that would meet harm at my hands."

Though the voice was stern, there was an honest ring in the tone that caused Lord Cecil to at once relinquish the sword-hilt and say:

"I believe you, St. Vale, whatever you may be to others, and God knows no one bewails your strange downfall more bitterly than do I."

"Reserve your pity, Cecil Milnor, for I ask no man's pity."

"I did not send for you to tell you that I

was sorry for the past and wished to have you place the hangman's noose around my neck, but to give into your charge one whom you little dream is in this part of the world."

Lord Cecil was struck by the bitterness of St. Vale's manner, in what he at first said, and then impressed by his reference to one whom he desired to place under his protection, and he said, kindly:

"To whom do you refer, St. Vale?"

"To one you love."

"Ah! then rest assured that all I can do for such an one I will do."

"I know it, my lord, and hence I brought her to you."

"Whom do you mean?" and the color left Lord Cecil's face.

"Miss La Rue."

"Ob, Heaven! Lena La Rue in *your* power!"

The emphasis on the pronoun stung St. Vale, and he replied, warmly:

"Ay, and in as honorable company as though she were with my Lord Cecil Milnor."

"Pardon me, St. Vale, for though you may have dyed your hands crimson with the blood of mankind, I will not doubt your honor toward a woman in your power."

"Lord Cecil, I thank you for those words."

"But listen while I tell you that Miss La Rue was unfortunately captured on the packet-ship in which she sailed from Halifax, and carried to the island rendezvous of the Buccaneer League."

"By yourself, the Ocean Vampire?"

"No, by a pirate captain who treated her as though she were his own sister."

"Finding her at the island, I brought her at once to you, for I was in Barbadoes when you sailed from there for this port, not being able to get your vessel repaired there."

"And Miss La Rue is on this vessel now, poor girl?"

"Yes, and within hearing of your voice."

As St. Vale spoke a slender form suddenly sprung back in the shadow of the cabin, and with an exclamation of joy, Lord Cecil caught her in his arms, while St. Vale silently glided from the cabin and left the restored lovers together.

For some time they sat talking together, and then St. Vale entered.

"Pardon me, my lord, but a boat full of armed men are pulling from the Petrel to my vessel, and I cannot permit them to come on board."

"I will at once order them back, for they are anxious regarding my safety," and Lord Cecil went on deck, and hailed the boat with:

"Ho, Vernon, is that you?"

"Ay, ay, my lord," came the answer.

"Return to the brig, and I will come soon in the boat from this vessel."

"Have my cabin put in order for a lady guest."

There was a muttering of surprise in the boat, which at once put back, while, turning to St. Vale, Lord Milnor said:

"St. Vale, I am cruising in these waters only to hunt down the Ocean Vampire, which name you bear."

"But I will leave it for a man who has more meanness in his nature than I confess to, to be so vile as to capture you under the present circumstances."

"From my heart I thank you, and may it never be my misfortune to return you evil for the good you have this night done me!"

He drew Lena toward him as he spoke, and her luggage having already been placed in the boat by Frank, he led her toward the gangway.

But she slipped from his sheltering arm, and grasping the hand of St. Vale in both her own, said in a low earnest tone:

"God forgive you, Leon St. Vale, and bless you too!"

"Farewell!"

He made no reply, and the next moment the two were gone, and the wretched man was alone with his sorrows.

CHAPTER XLIV.

THE HEIRESS OF CASTLE CURSE.

IN the grand old pile of stones, once known as Castle Welcome Haven, but which had been left to Lady Eve Alstone with the dying curse of her uncle, who had been forced to make his will in her favor, and thereby had gained the name of Castle Curse, sat the heiress.

It was at the sunset hour, and just one year and a half since she had parted from Leon St.

Vale on that fateful day when he boarded the schooner at the head of a pirate horde.

In that time Eve Alstone had changed but little, for her rare beauty of face and form still clung to her, but in her heart there was the grave of a buried love, and oftentimes when alone it was mirrored in her eyes.

The sunset rays, falling upon her as she sat upon a balcony of the castle, overlooking the sea, gave a rosy hue to her cheeks, or perhaps it was a real glow, called there by a letter she held open in her hands, and which she had received that afternoon, and read and reread for the hundredth time.

As that letter will interest the reader, I will give its contents; or at least such parts of it as refer to the characters who have figured in this story.

It was dated at Havana, in the island of Cuba, the fifteenth of October, 1817, and read:

"MY OWN CHERISHED EVE:

"Words cannot portray to you the happiness I feel at last, being able to write you a long letter and tell you all about myself, and my noble, splendid husband, for I am no longer Miss Lena La Rue, but Lady Cecil Milnor.

"But there is a shadow in my joy when I remember how we two chatted in the long ago of our lovers, and I feel that my dream of hope has been more than realized, and yours so rudely broken.

"It nearly broke my heart to give you up, when you sailed for England; but I deemed it my duty to go to New York, at the call of my guardian, and yet, as it turned out, I have not yet gotten there, though I started.

"Our ship was captured by a pirate schooner, robbed of all its valuables, and I was held as a hostage for ransom, while the other passengers were allowed to go on their way, being poor in this world's goods.

"But ever strange are the workings of Providence, for that vessel never reached port, though spoken by other crafts, and is supposed to have foundered in a gale, while I, the one exception, have reached the haven of my hopes and happiness.

"The captain of the pirate schooner, Juan Morena, whatever his outward crimes have been, was at heart a true gentleman, for he treated me with brotherly regard, though he did me the honor to ask me to marry him.

"He carried me to his island retreat, and one day there sailed into the haunt a merchant brig, and who do you think was in command?

"Why, Leon St. Vale, poor fellow, that gave up a noble life for an ignoble one.

"He proclaimed himself chief, by virtue of a pair of Gold Fetters he possessed, and which are the secret symbol of the Buccaneer League, giving to the possessor great power.

"But my pirate lover refused to yield his command, a duel followed, and St. Vale killed him before my eyes.

"Then he carried me in the brig to a seaport near, where the Petrel was undergoing repairs, and gave me in charge of Lord Cecil, and the sequel is that we were married in Havana one week ago.

"But Leon St. Vale?"

"I hear your query, for the old bond can never be broken, I well know, dear Eve.

"Well, he returned to his lawless acts again, and eludes all attempts at capture.

"Some say that he is the Ocean Vampire, and others that he is not; but Lord Cecil believes that he is, and for the sake of suffering humanity he and Sir Roslyn Stannix, in the Vulture, scour the seas continually to hunt him down.

"But I will not believe that he is that monster, after all he did for me; but time alone will show.

"Now, dear Eve, I am going soon to my home in New York, to await there until my noble husband is ordered back to England, and then I will accompany him and have the joy of seeing you once more.

"Write me to my New York address, which you have.

"With love from Cecil and myself,

"Your devoted friend,
"LENA."

Such was the letter, and it caused pearly tears to roll across the fair cheeks of Lady Eve as she recalled her buried love she had held for St. Vale when he was all worthy of her devoted attachment.

Long into the night she sat there, the moon streaming down upon the balcony, and silvering the waves of the sea.

Presently she started, for a shadow fell upon her, and leaping lightly over the balcony a man stood before her.

She tried to cry out, but her tongue could articulate no sound.

She tried to fly from the balcony, but her limbs refused to obey her bidding.

And it was no wonder that she was so deeply moved, for Leon St. Vale stood before her.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE MEETING.

"LADY EVE, do you not know me?"

There was the same pathos as of old, the same softness in the tone, and Eve Alstone's heart trembled as Leon St. Vale asked the question.

But, determined to school her heart against any weakness, she said coldly, recovering her composure by a mighty effort:

"Yes, Leon St. Vale, I know you not as you were, but as the Ocean Vampire."

"Ha! do you believe me to be one and the same with that inhuman monster?" he cried excitedly.

"Do you dare deny it, sir?"

"Ay, dare I deny that I am such a brute in the shape of man, Eve Alstone.

"I have sinned, yes, but not to become such as the Vampire."

"And what do you here, Sir Pirate?"

"Sir Pirate? Ay, heap scorn and epithets upon me.

"Judge me ere you have heard my defense, while I go from you, regretting that I was fool enough to wish to gaze again upon your face."

He spoke in such bitterness that he moved her heart deeply, and she said softly:

"Will you, upon your honor, tell me that you are not the Ocean Vampire?"

"Curse the very thought that I be such as he is.

"Why, Lady Eve Alstone, that man, that demon in human shape is my prisoner, and lying in irons on board my vessel, which is anchored not half a league from here."

"Do you speak the truth, Leon St. Vale?" she eagerly asked.

"Listen, and you shall hear all, for I will offer no defense of myself, and tell you the whole truth."

She waited breathlessly, and then he told her of the first crime of her father, when he had kept some property already sold and paid for, at the instigation of Robert Brent.

That he lay in the hammock and overheard the story, as also the other sin of Sir Grey in not putting a bullet in Lord Caverly's pistol the day of the duel, he told her; but he kept back the damning tale of her birth, and the change of infants by the old nurse, for he would not pain her heart to its depths.

Nor did he shrink from telling her that he demanded her father's consent, knowing the secrets against him, for him to claim her as his wife, and the attack upon him by Sir Grey, the struggle, the accidental discharge of the pistol and the fatal result, with the accusation against the seaman Robert Brent, his aiding him to escape, and the cause of his duel with Kent Lomax.

Breathlessly she listened to his every word, giving a slight moan only when he spoke of her father's death, and then, in the same low, but distinct tones he went on and told the story of the brigantine's capture and flight, his double struggle with the Vampire and his African slave, and the crime he committed to save her and Lena La Rue from the power of the inhuman chief.

"That night, Lady Eve, I swore," he went on, "by the Holy of Holies, to live to revenge myself upon the Ocean Vampire."

"I boarded vessels in combat, but never struck a blow against the innocent, and lived only for revenge, until at last I escaped from him, and became as a bloodhound upon his trail.

"I waited long in the island retreat for his coming, and at last he came, and fell into my power, along with Robert Brent and his crew of devils.

"From him I learned who and what he is, and heard from his lips that he was the dishonored son of Lucas Leon, my kinsman, who left me as an inheritance, the knowledge that he had cruelly murdered my father, and the Golden Fetters, the crest of his house.

"To that son, the Vampire, worthy of such a father, he left also a pair of Golden Fetters and his curse.

"Now, Lady Eve Alstone, you know all, and I have come across the seas to deliver to my king the Ocean Vampire and his crew, in return for a pardon for the sins I was forced to commit.

"If his majesty refuse me, then I shall blow my vessel to atoms, and with it myself and the Vampire, ay, and all on board."

He ceased speaking, and stood with folded arms before her.

"Leon," she said softly, rising and placing a tiny hand upon either shoulder:

"In my heart I forgive you, and I crave you to forgive my doubt of you.

"To-morrow I will myself seek the king, and, if he will not give to you full pardon, then I shall return to you and share your fate; whatever it may be."

"God bless you, darling Eve," and he drew her toward him in loving embrace, and thus those two, so long parted, were united once more.

CHAPTER XL.

CONCLUSION.

TRUE to her promise, Lady Eve started on her journey to see the king, and in due time returned with full pardon from his majesty for Leon St. Vale and the buccaneers who had faithfully served him.

And there was a special order to the young officer who had hunted the Vampire from the seas, to hang the dreaded chief, his lieutenant, Robert Brent, and his crew in chains, in the rigging of his vessel, and sail into port and anchor with the ghastly forms there hanging, as a warning to outlaws the seas over.

And this order Leon St. Vale strictly obeyed, and the townspeople and seamen of the numerous vessels in port, stood aghast as they saw sweeping up the harbor a rakish brigantine and saucy-looking schooner with scores of forms dangling in their rigging; but the Vampire flag, beneath the English ensign, told the story to all of what the strange sight meant, and loud and wild were the cheers that were given, especially from the crews of two weather-beaten brigs of war that had lately come across the seas from a fruitless search after that very pirate chief.

Quickly their commanders sprung into their respective boats and rowed on board the brigantine, where Sir Roslyn Stannix and Captain Lord Cecil Milnor were welcomed by Captain Leon St. Vale, with a pardon and commission in his hand, and related to their astonished ears the story of his adventures.

One week after, in the grand parlor of Welcome Haven Castle, which had dropped the curse from its name, the same story was told again by the hero, and corroborated in every word by a sad-faced woman, in whom no one who knew her as Frank, the sailor lad, would ever recognize her in feminine attire, and who, as the reverged and sorrowing wife of the Ocean Vampire, won the deepest sympathy of the little group gathered beneath the roof of Lady Eve Alstone.

And, on that same night, when the stories of the past were told by Leon St. Vale for the last time, he was bound in holy matrimony to Eve Alstone, Pere Brandt, a sad-eyed priest, who had known also much of sorrow in the past, and has sins to repent of, as all of us have, kind reader, performing the ceremony, while Lord Cecil Milnor gave the bride away, and Sir Roslyn Stannix, though on the shady side of forty-five, was the young captain's best man.

Whether it was at seeing his brother officers, Leon St. Vale and Lord Cecil, so happy, that made Sir Roslyn incline toward matrimony, I cannot say; but certain it is, that some months after he was quietly married by Pere Brandt to Fanny Alstone, for the lonely woman, with no kindred ties in the world, had taken the name of Lady Eve, at that lady's urgent request, she having forever discarded that of Frank the sailor lad along with the memories of the past.

One other character of this romance, kind reader, disposed of himself by committing suicide to shun some disgraceful exposure, and that one was Kent Lomax, who, after all his plotting and sinning, did not succeed in winning the heiress of Castle Curse, or go down to history as the captor of the Ocean Vampire.

THE END.

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